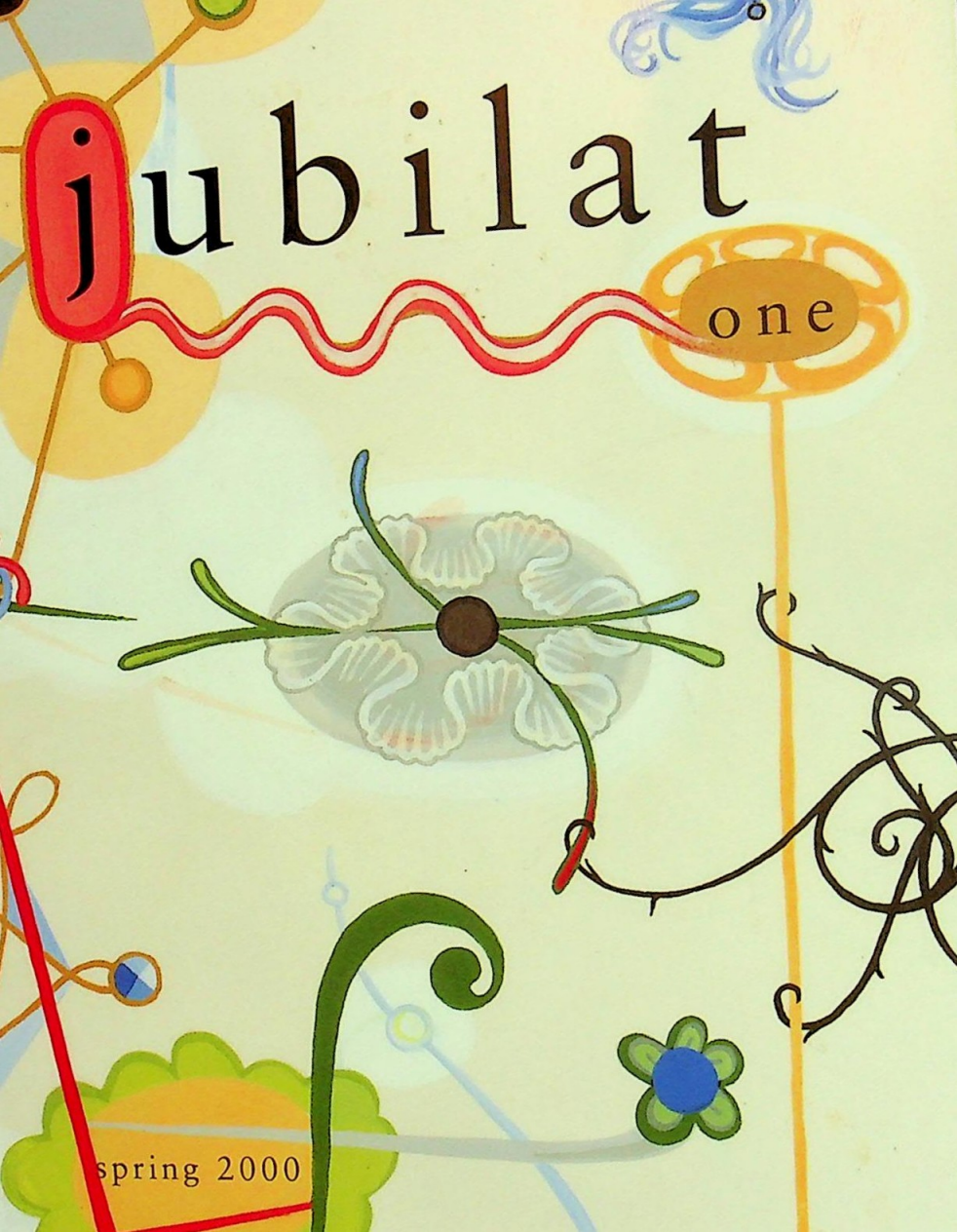




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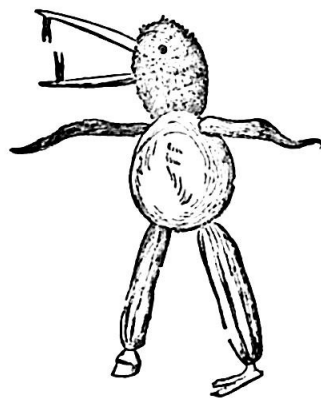
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JEFF HILLIARD

FRAGMENT 96 LP

Sappho

]Sardis [
]often turning her thoughts here
]
 you like a goddess
 known and in your song most of all she rejoiced.

But now she is conspicuous among Lydian women
as sometimes at sunset
the rosyfingered moon

surpasses all the stars. And her light
stretches over salt sea
equally and flowerdeep fields.

And the beautiful dew is poured out
and roses bloom and frail
chervil and flowering sweetclover.

But she goes back and forth remembering
gentle Atthis and with longing
her light mind is eaten [

But to go there []much
talks []

Not easy for us
to equal goddesses in lovely form [
]

]

]and]desire
 Aphrodite

]nectar poured from

gold

]with hands Persuasion

]

]

]

]into the Geraistion
]beloveds
]of none
]into desire I shall come

—translated from the Greek by Anne Carson

NOTES

“Sardis”: capital city of the rich kingdom of Lydia in Asia Minor, Sardis was a commercial center and said to be the place where coinage was invented.

“rosyfingered” is an adjective used habitually by Homer to designate the red look of Dawn. I think Sappho means to be startling, but I don’t know how startling, when she moves the epithet to a nocturnal sky. Also startling is the fecundity of sea, field and memory which appears to flow from this uncanny moon and fill the nightworld of the poem—swung from a thread of “as sometimes . . .” in verse 7. Homer too liked to extend a simile this way, creating a parallel surface of such tangibility it rivals the main story for a minute. Homer is more concerned than Sappho to keep the borders of the two surfaces intact; epic arguably differs from lyric precisely in the way it manages such rivalry.

“you”: Compare this triangular reverie of moonlit women with that of Emily Dickinson’s letter to Susan Gilbert, October 9, 1851:

I wept a tear here, Susie, on purpose for you—because this “sweet silver moon” smiles in on me and Vinnie, and then it goes so far before it gets to you—and then you never told me if there was any moon in Baltimore—and how do I know Susie—that you see her sweet face at all? She looks like a fairy tonight, sailing around the sky in a little silver gondola with stars for gondoliers. I asked her to let me ride a little while ago—and told her I would get out when she got as far as Baltimore, but she only smiled to herself and went sailing on.

I think she was quite ungenerous—but I have learned the lesson and shant ever ask her again. To day it rained at home—sometimes

it rained so hard that I fancied you could hear its patter—patter, patter, as it fell upon the leaves—and the fancy pleased me so, that I sat and listened to it—and watched it earnestly. Did you hear it Susie—or was it only fancy? Bye and bye the sun came out—just in time to bid us goodnight, and as I told you sometime, the moon is shining now.

It is such an evening Susie, as you and I would walk and have such pleasant musings, if you were only here perhaps we would have a “Reverie” after the form of “Ik Marvel,” indeed I do not know why it wouldn’t be just as charming as of that lonely Bachelor, smoking his cigar—and it would be far more profitable as “Marvel” only marvelled, and you and I would try to make a little destiny to have for our own. . . .

(Letters of Emily Dickinson I.143-4)

More explicitly than Sappho, Emily Dickinson evokes the dripping fecundity of daylight as foil for the mind’s voyaging at night. Almost comically, she personifies the moon as chief navigator of the liquid thoughts that women like to share in the dark, in writing. And perhaps Ik Marvel (a popular author of the day, who dwelt upon his own inner life in bestselling “Reveries”) is a sort of Homeric prototype—out of whose clichés she may startle a bit of destiny for herself.

ALL THE KING'S MEN

Dean Young

Already February and he hasn't even nailed
a single boxing glove to the wall. Because
he kept putting his head inside a white rock
he missed his appointment with clouds
so the clouds wrote dismissive surveys.
The reason you never see black birds
at symphonies is orchestral music
makes them explode. Because everything
is cash and carry, he crossed out the words
so you'd read them, slept in castles
and cardboard boxes simultaneously.
The last thing that came out of Basquiat
was a beautiful pink foam. Not a crown
or a copyright, not a skeleton
~~riding a skeleton horse.~~
Was he trying to disprove his body
was a ~~dream~~ forgery? He broke off
his father's esophagus but it grew back.
On tuesdays his vomit was entirely caviar,
wednesdays XXXXXX. You couldn't touch him
without getting smeared with money.
Between everything and nothingness:
a pair of mink handcuffs. The hour passed
while he dried under the wingbeats
of gnats and televisions

tense as the interval between hiccups
then normal service resumed. Appreciating.
A formless thing made entirely of thorns
to be swallowed.

KARBALA: A HISTORY OF THE “HOUSE OF SORROW”

Agha Shahid Ali

In a distant age and climate, the tragic scene of the death of Husayn will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader.

—Edward Gibbon

I

Jesus and his disciples, passing through the plain of Karbala, saw “a herd of gazelles, crowding together and weeping.” Astonished, the disciples looked at their Lord. He spoke: “At this site the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) will one day be killed.” And Jesus wept. *Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain. . . .* And Jesus wept. And as if the news has just reached them—fourteen hundred years after the Battle of Karbala (near ancient Babylon, not far from the Euphrates) in the year A.H. 61 / A.D. 680—mourners weep for “the prince among martyrs,” Hussain, grandson of the Prophet and son of Ali (“Father of Clay”) and Fatima (the Prophet’s only surviving child). Memorializing Hussain on the Tenth of Muharram (*Ashura*) is the rite of Shi’a Islam—so central that at funerals those events are woven into elegies, every death framed by that “Calvary.” For just “as Jesus went to Jerusalem to die on the cross,” Hussain “went to Karbala to accept the passion that had been meant for him from the beginning of time.”

II

From the beginning of time? When Ishmael was saved, did the ram suffice, even though Gabriel had brought it from Paradise, from the very presence of God? Because both father as the slayer and son as the victim had submitted to His will, God called out, "Abraham, you have fulfilled the vision." And He ransomed Ishmael with a "great redeeming sacrifice"—completed only centuries later on the battlefield that became the altar. Abraham foreknew all and wept bitterly. God spoke: "Abraham, I have through your grief for Hussain ransomed your grief for your son as though you had slain him with your own hand."

III

At the call of the people of Kufa (their hearts were with him, their swords with his enemies), Hussain, with his family and supporters, set out from Mecca, "along the pilgrim route across the desert of central Arabia," to challenge the tyranny of the Caliph Yazid. In Karbala their caravan (2 Muharram 61 / 2 October 680) was intercepted by Yazid's troops under Obeidullah. Till the tenth of Muharram, they withstood the siege, choosing death, not surrender. Prevented from reaching the Euphrates, for three days before the massacre they were without water. Anguished by the children's cries, Abbas, Hussain's half brother, led a daring sortie to fill a few waterskins but he perished.

IV

On 9 Muharram, as if putting on his own shroud, Hussain spoke: "Tomorrow our end will come. I ask you to go away to safety. I free you, I

do not hold you back. Night will give you a cover; use it as a steed." He had the lights turned out. Fewer than one hundred remained—among them the women, the children, the old.

V

And the "borrowed night" ends. They line up before the army. The rear of the tents is protected by wood and reeds set on fire. The first arrows come, in a shower. Hussain's nephew Qasim is struck and dies in his uncle's arms. Every man is killed. The women look on in terror. Alone, Hussain returns to the tents to console the children and women, among them his sister Zainab, and bids them farewell. At sunset, the soldiers turn to pillage. The bodies are decapitated, stripped of all covering, left without burial. Hussain's severed head is brought to Obeidullah. He carelessly turns it over with his staff. "Gently," one officer protests. "By Allah! I have seen those lips kissed by the blessed mouth of Muhammad."

VI

The morning of 12 Muharram saw seventy-two heads raised on lances, each held by a soldier, followed by the women on camels. One of Hussain's sons, the only male survivor, had lain sick during battle. The "adornment of God's servants," he was saved when Zainab threw herself over him. At the sight of the decapitated bodies, the women's lamentations rose: "O Muhammad! The angels of Heaven send blessings upon you, but this is your Hussain, so humiliated and disgraced, covered with blood and cut into pieces; and, O Muhammad, your daughters are made captives, your butchered family is left for the East Wind to cover with dust!" The head of Hussain was put on display in Kufa before it was sent to Yazid. Held in a dungeon, the captives before long were taken to Damascus.

VII

Mourners beg for water—the martyrs' thirst. They wound their heads, and "the green grassy field" where their processions end "becomes bloodied and looks like a field of poppies." *And my brother knows he will die. He has himself put on his shroud.* A deluge of weeping follows. So I remember, since childhood. One *majlis* stays—Summer 1992—when for two years Death had turned every day in Kashmir into some family's Karbala. We celebrated *Ashura* with relatives, in the afternoon—because of night curfew. That evening, at home, my mother was suddenly in tears. I was puzzled, then very moved: Since she was a girl she had felt Zainab's grief as her own.

VIII

At my mother's funeral a mourner sang one of her favorite Kashmiri elegies, given to Zainab, in which her exile is near unbearable. Those words now are my mother's, for she too was tired, fighting death, from hospital to hospital, from city to city.

SEVEN POEMS

Paul Celan

Floated down blackwater rapids,
past the sheen of
scars, are
forty trees of life,

completely stripped.
Upstream swimmer, woman, you alone
number them each, you touch them all.

Spasms, I love you, psalms,

O semensmeared one, feelwalls
deep in the gulch of you exult,

You, eternal, uneternitized,
eternitized, uneternal you,

selah,

into you, into you
I sing the scarscore of the bone-staff,

O red of reds, strummed far behind
the pubic hair, in caves,

out there, round and round
the infinite non of the canon,

you throw at me the nine-times
twined
and dripping wreath
of trophy teeth.

Graygreens
from nearby water-shafts
dug out by unawakened hands:

the depths
yield up their growth
without resistance,
without a sound.

Save it,
before
the Stone Day has blown dry
the swarms of men
and beasts, just
as the seven-reed flute mandates,
in front of mouth and muzzle.

Ring-narrowing Day under
the heavenleaf's web of veins.
Across large cells of empty time, through
the rainfall, climbs
a black-blue thing: the
thought-beetle.

Words in blood-bloom
throng before his feelers.

The hourglass buried
in peony-shadow:

when my thoughts finally come down
Pentecost Lane
they will inherit the Reich
where
trapped in sand, you still
get whiffs of air.

Attached to out-cast
dream relics, Truth
comes down, a child,
over the ridge.

In the valley,
buzzed-about by
clods of earth,
by spray of scree,
by seeds of eye,
the crutch
leafs through the blooming crown-high
No.

Chitin sunlings
newly hatched.

Armored amphibians
wrap themselves up
in blue prayer-shawls, the sand-
dependent gull calls out in the
affirmative, the furtive
fire-leaf
thinks things over.

—translated from the German by Heather McHugh and Nikolai Popov

THE HALF-SKETCHED HEAD

Mary Ruefle

THIS IS WHY

It was of no use, trying to discern whether the anchorite was happy or unhappy: in the first days of her visit Mary assumed this was why she had come. The longer she stayed the more she felt at home; the more she felt at home, the more she felt free to be miserable. Mary saw that the question was useless.

REGRETS

The anchorite was in the habit of keeping lists. Among them Mary noticed a continuing list of *regrets*, under that heading; and though many of them were crossed off or blackened out, new ones were added as well. Mary asked him if a kind of balance were kept, to which he replied: "If only! As a matter of fact, your question is an item I have been tempted to *add* to the list."

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

There was a long silence during which he seemed to be struggling. Suddenly he looked up at her. "I wish to tell you as quickly as possible that when I was a boy it was my sole responsibility to feed the baby goats from a bottle containing their mother's milk. On one such occasion I managed to spill the goat's milk down my shirtfront—over which I should have been wearing a smock in the first place. And though I can't tell you why, I was wearing my best shirt: perhaps for the like of that alone I deserved to be punished. I went immediately to the washroom and began to rinse out the milk spots,

using a large bar of my mother's soap, which was always in plentiful supply since she made it herself. And as I stood there it struck me—my mother's soap was goat's milk soap, and with goat's milk I was desperately trying to erase goat's milk. That something could be its own remedy—though I did not then think in those terms—struck me as a rather serious joke. It was my first occasion of *panic*."

MOMENTS OF DELIGHT

Once Mary found his shopping list—it was written on a pink slip from one of those rainbow pads: trout, staple gun, cherries, hammer, ribbon, wire. "Ah, that summer," he said, "that summer. I sought perfection in all things. When a few groceries were needed I would spend hours devising—then revising—the list. Then in the store I carried it crunched in my hand, filled with an excruciating fear: the fear that others would discover, perhaps in the checkout line, that my list was less perfect than theirs."

AGAIN

On the second occasion of Mary's finding a shopping list—this one pinned under the weight of an extra-large egg snug in its styrofoam socket—the anchorite chanced to see her with it. Peering over her shoulder he read "Rhubarb, roses, crab legs, gray socks." "Isn't that the fate, Madam, of one destined to think in scraps?" What follows are a few of those scraps, thrown to Mary while she did what few chores needed to be done while tending to the anchorite, who was ailing at that time.

RELIGION

Whatever habit one is most faithful to—whatever one does most, loves best, is their religion. A simple matter of precedence.

PENANCE

Penance is the heart of the matter. Why do any of us live the way we do? It is why I live here, in the middle of nowhere. Precisely, *it is the penance for never having sinned.*

PRAYER

Can we conceive of a religion without prayer? And what, exactly, is prayer? If I am in prayer I seem to be concentrated. But I seem to be concentrating *now* and I am certainly not in prayer. What then is peculiar to one's concentration in prayer? It seems, simply, that one must concentrate on something that doesn't exist, as in prayers to our Lord, or prayers for the future—prayers for a turn of events, against all odds. What counts is that it does not exist. In which case, algebra seems a very good way to get to heaven.

AN ASIDE

It would be best if one could not hear oneself pray, since one always tends to eavesdrop on their own conversations with God, as though *neither* of the parties were oneself!

Which brings me to the subject of gossip.

GOSSIP

It is true I once spent some time in a novitiate. One evening after supper there was a lively conversation concerning whether the ideal hands for prayer should be gloved or ungloved. I suggested that they be disembodied. "Do you yourself pray—now?" Mary asked.

"My hands pray."
"And what do they pray for?"
"My hands pray to be kept on!"

HIS TATTOO

Mary noticed a small door, slightly ajar, etched on the left side of his chest.

HIS MOTTO

"I disappear."

Mary learned the anchorite was a great believer in mottos. He dreamt of a world in which mottos were given in place of names. In such a world, the mere presentation or introduction of one person to another would result in effortless conversation:

"Capable of Dissembling"
"I build"
"Free from all pastimes"
"With honor and valor"
"I disappear"

MARY'S MOTTO

At the end of the first year of their acquaintance the anchorite gave Mary a motto. It had been a difficult decision, he said, for he wished to bond them through similar mottos yet bestow Mary with her own characteristics. He finally decided upon "I disappoint."

ON SEX

Just as one lover can be better than another it seems possible that one celibate might be . . . more accomplished . . . than the next. In this vein, I consider myself the greatest of all celibates.

NEWS

"Look here," the anchorite said one day, "I have been reading about a new abyss."

"What's that?" asked Mary.

"The Eucharist is acidic and will upset an ulcer."

INCOGNITO

Some of us are happy living a double life, and some of us are tortured by it—though for those there is always the hope that our doubleness will consist in being both of these persons.

CONVERSION

The anchorite ate a single fried egg each morning, just as the sun came up. One morning, while seasoning his egg, he told Mary how he had come to have faith: he simply realized that he had never—not once—refilled his salt and pepper shakers, which he had used profusely for twenty years.

RESPONSIBILITY

God is a toddler. He is learning to walk, tumbling into everything, touching the red, luminized surface of your innermost thoughts like coils on a hotplate. He has got to learn. It is up to you to teach him.

HOMUNCULUS

I believe it was Chekhov who said there should be a little man with a hammer in the heads of happy persons, to remind them of the poor and famished. A noble thought . . . but the little man is also a member of the Guilt Berets, and the spiritually fortified should be able to be happy in the midst

of great squalor, disappointment, and ghastly circumstances. Thus the homunculus must be shot.

IMPERSONAL PROBLEMS

Sometimes I think I am of a species that is bored to extinction, or that I am the last of such a species whose predominant trait was boredom. Nothing *modern* mind you—not in the least. Just an oversized head that looks up as soon as it gets dark and is heard to remark “Heigh-ho little moon, heigh-ho!” Wherein completes the activity of an evening.

ON WOMEN

I met a twenty-first century French feminist literary critic who said, “How can women describe their feelings in a language that was primarily devised by men to describe theirs?” I told her the truth—that that was a direct quote from Thomas Hardy.

LARGE, SAD NUMBERS

Which number is greater—the number of poems collected and preserved by man, or the number of poems thrown away by the women who wrote them? And if the lesser poems outnumber the greater poems, consider this: is it sadder to read such poems or to write them?

TRICK OR TREAT

My head is like a pumpkin with eyes; both hollow and lit. Hollow except for a few seeds, left over from my birth, and long bits of stringy, mashed flesh—yet someone, who is most definitely *not* myself, has placed a candle there. It positively glows.

HOW FINELY WE ARGUE UPON MISTAKEN FACTS!

ON PRIVACY

Imagine the man who, after having *made the world*, consented to become a carpenter! I'm led to believe there was a want of privacy. In other words, I'm led to believe there is absolutely no substitute for a human lifetime.

THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

Mary noticed the anchorite did not wear spectacles, nor was there any evidence of such a need. But one large magnifying glass he did keep, and used to distinguish anything he himself had put to ink. "Can't you read your own writing?" she asked, pointing to the magnifying glass. "Oh, that," he said, "it's because my thoughts are so small."

BOOKS

I've read a few, but as for scholars, professors, intellectuals, academics, authors and poets, historians and philosophers—now there's a lot I can't get close to. Their lives would *not exist* without their books. How they must suffer from an overdose of masterpieces! My idea is . . . memorize as much as you can and forget the rest. Heigh-ho little moon!

ON POETRY

Poets are so coarsely bred they believe in force-feeding, arranged marriages, predestined outbursts. Any two tricks between words will do. It's true, I, too, delight in being vulgar . . . Yet once I was a boy of five years and one

place: I didn't even know the word Poetry existed; I had never read a poem: what did I do then? I went fishing! I lived in a trout's world, that strange underwater adagio. A slow circle. And now . . . I think of it, so poetically! Haven't I then been two completely different persons? And lived in *at least* two worlds? China trees, cinnamon trees, cypress and spindlewood, the ash tree and the holly bush: some dog has shat on them all. The true trouble with poetry is simple: it depends on distraction to survive. If God is a poet then I *am* afraid—for it is frightening to think that He is a no one, and speaks not from Himself, but from the character He has found in me.

ART HISTORY

In Bruges, in the 18th century, they sold the shutters of a triptych by Gerard David at the request of the sacristan, who objected to the trouble of opening and closing them, complaining that they broke the altar candles each time he did so. Wise man.

FAVORITE PRAYER

Lord, let *nothing* get behind me.

DARK MOOD

In a dark mood, I lie down on the ground and the sun that has reached the earth and sunk into it rises up through the ground and enters my back. Nothing comes from above.

DREAM

A very old librarian with the kind of blue eyes that absorb nothing but reflect everything. The kind you cannot look at, the blueblind eyes of a psychic or beauty queen. She had skin like a fine handkerchief that has been

folded many times, smelled faintly of talcum, and wore a rhinestone flower on her lapel. She was in fact the world's expert on violets. She was very sweet to me and gave me a tour of the library which lasted from sunrise to sunset—that's how large the library was. She listened politely while I explained to her that I was only an anchorite with a very small IQ and could not possibly read all the books in her library or even understand them and that the tour, though finely given, had somewhat depressed me. I felt she had wasted her time, and I was sorry. She was even more polite, and infinitely sweeter, when she explained my mistake. These are the books, she said, that have yet to be written, how could anyone read them?

SEQUEL TO A DREAM

The very next night the librarian came back to me, for she had forgotten to tell me something of the utmost importance. She said violets are more common in English literature than the rose, a little known fact that was nonetheless true, and if I thought about this bit of information for long enough it was the equivalent of reading all the books in any earthly library and all those in her own. She told me this with great tact and compassion, as if offering me a little aspirin in the palm of her hand.

INTELLECTUAL FATE

Once I was face to face with a great snowy owl. As it happened I said to myself *this will never happen again*. Such a sad reaction! The bird flew off before I could have any other. This is an example of my intellectual fate. I have no memory of the bird whatsoever, and it never happened again.

ON BEARS

The anchorite wanted most to know what the bear felt like upon first awakening from his hibernation. When Mary asked him to elaborate he replied, "That is precisely the question I have in mind: is it an elaborate moment

for the bear, or is it essentially spare? Anchored and massive, or does he feel—wouldn't it be delightful—like a fly in a cathedral?"

ON CANCER

We are the cancer of the earth. Because of us she wanders the universe with a shaved head, full of spleen, without a cure. One day she will lose the words for *white hawthorn*, *black locust*, *Dutch elm*. Then *periwinkle* will be gone. She will, undoubtedly, still spin. The sound of a Coke bottle being opened on the next planet will bring some momentary sense into her days: she will remember the word for *fizz*. And when she dies, who will be seen squatting on her grave?

ON SYMBOLS

"I don't know of any," he said.

AGE

How odd the years are. If we were thermometers everyone would want to be 80.

PAST LIVES

The problem with past lives is just that . . . they're extinct. Some sooner than others, and none so soon as mine. I am reasonably assured that I was Phillip the Assured, who in 1467 was the richest prince in Europe and shut himself up in a little workshop to spend his remaining days fitting together pieces of broken glass. They buried him in St. Donatian's and so great was the throng at his funeral, and the heat engendered by thousands of candles, that they shattered the gorgeous stained glass windows to let in air . . .

GIFT

Mary asked about the fig tree in his garden. "It was a gift," he said, "from—shall we say—an anchoress I once knew. The lady in question has escaped my attention. I dare say she knew exactly what she was presenting me with: the fig tree, as you know, has had an illustrious past: Buddha attained enlightenment under the relative of a fig tree and Jesus made one barren. Have I then been blessed or cursed?"

BONSAI

Though sometimes it is simple, it is never easy—to be alone and thinking of nothing. In the bonsai brain, there is no branch so old, and none so small, that from time to time it doesn't do something peculiar!

NAZI

I picked a bouquet of twenty lady's slippers, the genitalia of spring, which are an endangered species in these parts. They sat on my desk in a paper cup and gave me great joy. The following year our spring woods, devoid of any such mauve, gave me an even greater thrill.

FAVORITE NOVEL

The book whose every page is turned by Satan's breath! The most ill-mannered, violent, demented book ever written—and by a lady!—can you guess? No, Mary, you're much too dull to know I mean *Wuthering Heights*. And need I remind you of the opening lines of Chapter Ten: "A charming introduction to a hermit's life! Four weeks' torture, tossing, and sickness!"

ONE BOOK

How many books have I read? Only one—just as everyone who is literate on this earth has read only one book, or, to be precise, is in the process of reading the one book they will complete in this lifetime. That book is the particular sum of every book they have ever read written in *the particular order* in which those books were read. The book is never the same, for no two persons have ever read exactly the same books in exactly the same order. There is a great difference between *The Secret of Larkspur Lane* followed by *Anna Karenina* and *Anna Karenina* followed by *The Secret of Larkspur Lane*. And if *What One Can Do With A Chafing Dish* happens to fall between . . . I don't mean to insult the genetic researchers, but I have a hunch that if no two people are alike, this is why.

ILLITERATES

What makes two *illiterates* unlike? But there are no illiterates! What you call an illiterate is simply someone who has the time to read the greatest books of all—a bush, a bird, a toe—so that the same principle of a single book applies. In fact, the difference you seek is between those who don't understand what they read, and those who do. Now I ask you, to which of *these* persons does the greatest pleasure belong? That is the interesting question. I'll give you a hint: it is my great pleasure to know such an illiterate. Mary, have I ever misled you?

WORST YEARS

Mary asked which were the worst years of his life. "Well, there have been two *bad* years—1951 and again in 1976. Particularly dry springs—no morels, my dear."

LATE BREAKING NEWS

My latest occasion of panic was not so far removed from the first; ten days ago I realized I was sobbing in a Saab.

IT MAY BE

It may be, in an occasional pew, wisdom independent of thought arises: you ought to think deeply about this. There are not . . . as I once thought . . . a variety of ways in which we think. I began to worry that I was thinking less and fantasizing more. Until I realized that *all* thinking was fantasy—the reductionist, structuralist, logician, the computer and the dreamer . . . they are all fantasizing!

END RESULT

You should know there have been several opinions as to what makes the homo sapien distinct. But I think these can be safely reduced to three:—his ability to think symbolically, or metaphorically if you are a nit-picker,—his ability to be *bored*, which supports a basic non-utilitarian nature,—and his capacity, in all ages and in all places, for intoxication; the corn, palm, sugarcane, vine, curl of the tobacco leaf, poppy unfurled! The holy trinity of what makes man man, woman woman: isn't it sad and ridiculous that according to such criteria the classic human being would be *the bored drunk writing poetry*? And if I may carry the results further we may distill the distinctions to poetry alone, which first intoxicates and then bores.

REGRETS

That I am not an electron—lightest of all particles—lightest and lightest of mass—and still *to be*!

ON BURIAL

There are only two tombs: the tomb of Jesus and the tomb of Tut. Roll away one stone and you will be given everything: food, clothing, shelter: gems, cloth, seeds and oil, a replica of the world in pure gold. Roll away the other stone and there's nothing.

WOODS

Jorie Graham

No one has died just now.
But that is only as far as I know.
As far as I know a breath can be contained
by a line. O stubborn appetite: *I*, then *I*,
loping through the poem. Shall I do that again?
Can we put our finger on it?
These lines have my breathing in them, yes.
Also my body was here. Why try to disguise it.
In this morning of my year
that will never be given back.
Also those who will not give it back. Whoever they
may be.

How quietly they do their job
over this page. How can I know when it's the
case—oh swagger of dwelling in place, in voice—
surely one of us understands the importance.
Understands? Shall I wave a "finished" copy at you
whispering do you wish to come for lunch.
Nor do I want to dwell on this.
I cannot, actually, dwell on this.
There is no home. One can stand out here
and gesture wildly, yes. One can say "finished"
and look at the woods. One can even, say,
look *into* the woods, as I do now, here,
but also casting my eye out

to see (although that *was* yesterday) (seeing in through the alleyways
of trees, the slantings of morninglight)
(speckling) (golden) laying in
these foliate patternings, this goldfinch, this
suddenly dipping through and rising to sit very still
on top of the nearest pine, big coin, puffed-out,
turning in little hops and hopes when he turns, sometimes
entering full into
a beam of sun—becoming yellowest then—these line
endings

branching out too only so far
hoping for the light of an other's gaze to pan them,
as the gaze pans for gold in day, a day sometimes overcast,
but what

would the almost-gold (so that I can't
say "golden") bird be but your eye?
Do not harm him. I can bring him back,
and the way he hopped, turning, on the topmost spike
of the pine, how many minutes
ago was it I said "golden," and does he still linger there
turning chest into and out of the story, hot singular,
not able to shed light off himself yet so full
of my glance from this open window, me in relative
dark, running on something that cripples me,
do not harm him, do not touch him, don't probe
with the ghost your mind this future as it lays itself out
here, right over the day, straight from the font, and yes
I *am* afraid, and yes my fear is
flicking now from limb to limb, swooping once completely out of
sight—oh flickering long corridor—then
back,
the whole wind-sluiced avened continuum taking

my eye around in it—who could ever hold so many
thoughts in mind—here he is now, back, my fear,
—my mind gathering wildly up to still itself on him.

NATHANIEL: NODDLES ISLAND

Caroline Knox

Time and again Father took me—in 1740, 1742 or so—in the shallop or sailboat to Noddles Island in Boston Harbor. He had painted the city from there, looking back west as if approaching for the first time. I could see the Orange Tree Tavern near our house, and West Church and North, or thought I could. Sheep were and are kept there.

Who or what was Noddles? Father and I conjectured. He was Sir Ephrastus Noddles, a connection of the Addlepaters of Surrey. Never astute, Noddles had been knocked on the head in battle so often that all the sense had left it. He wore his clothes inside out, with the armor on the inside; he ate the pudding before the main course, wearing his nightshirt; thinking he had reached Nantucket, he kissed the ground of the island to which he was allowed to give his dubious name. In this way, Father and I made short work of rowing.

NATHANIEL: HOLDEN CHAPEL

Father drew his beautiful pilasters for the college chapel in 1744, when I was old enough to begin to understand his touch. The pilasters in pairs surround the small building, recalling in little the Parthenon, sacred to Pallas, and recalling as well the standing buttresses of medieval Christendom. The chapel site suggests the advent of a new quadrangle. The Holden crest nestles in the pediment, white and marmoreal.

Mother and Father and I heard the service read. The round arches of the door and windows lack ornament entirely. But then soon after this, at the capture of Louisbourg, Father received so many commissions, grand and celebratory, triumphalistic. Brass and satin and ermine; great gestures; feathers, paste, and wax.

BUMBLEBEES AND BUTTERFLIES

Bryan Tomasovich

These freaks aware of the bumblebee's failure
are in fact bumblebees. What they learn
by day they tell us
the same dull day. They bungle publicly, and chase
the mean disaster
of sirens.

Butterflies are the long-lasting bruise, rhythm
over city river, whimsy atop the museum.
Sun burns a black spot
in their eyes, these butterflies
but rarely do they get picked out of the sky.
They are our magic by day, and opprobrium
at the curfew bell . . .

disorderly opposite to the bumblebees.

Perpendicular streams . . .
the old moment and the young moment, these freaks

two padded hammers playing out
a different, but primordial ceremony of flight . . .
concentrated here like no other town.

Some argue memoranda and others create
plainsong, an isolate hum;

their combined rhythm
does not reveal
miscellaneous whatsoever in our town.

Freaks of low unemployment, freaks handing out newspapers
freaks who love the smell of brewery yeast . . .

See, their song is a long tongue of lumps,
song behind the autumn trees
and song on a wire. Song on two wires . . .

curdling, illegally camped at the river

song of police undercover
songs of the bosses, tit for tat tongues of subordinates
"clever-town" songs.

Our town is freaks.

Freaks hover
the mobius strip
of Germanic streets
and old socialist meeting halls.

Freaks hold our town tight at the corners
they fly at eye height . . . this
bumblebee
and butterfly crisis height.

The town has no chance to be topped by a circus.

DESERT POST CARDS

Jacqueline Osherow

I. HIGHWAY NINETY: THE ARAVAH

(thus saith the Lord: they found Grace in the desert, the people left over by the sword. . . . Jeremiah, 31:2)

I should have
known this,
should have
been able
to imagine
how the rock's
austerity consoles
itself, unrolling
its elaborate
double scroll,
to flood its
pale expanse
with sacred
words, those

fragments in
the ancient jars
redundant, since
all the rock
around the
Qumrun Caves

was already thick
with those
same words.

Even from
a moving
car, you can
see them:
their burning
columns in strict,
efficient rows,
like tiny
nimble caravans
across the desert.
See how they
come as close
as language comes
to the indivisibility
of prime numbers?
Prime words, then,
perfect words.

You'll say they're
in my head,
and so they are.

But they're also
out there, rising
off the rock,
what Jeremiah
meant by *grace*
in the desert:

how this
emptiness
redeems itself
with words. . . .

And my three
beauties, dreaming
in the back
are *the nation*
left over by
the sword, or,
rather, in their
case, their
grandparents'
case, the rifle
butt, typhus,
the crematoria,

their existence
inexplicable,
except by
miracle—
unless you
prefer to
call it
prophecy:
thus saith the Lord.

2. EYN AVDAT

You've stumbled
on the unremitting
aftermath of
earthly argument
with outer space—
the vast, empty
empire still
victorious, holding
forth at this,
its farthest
outpost: a stark,
completely
barren curve
of cliffs—
one meteorite's
urgent last request.

Here, if you enter
through a crevice
in the rock,
you come upon
two sapphire pools
so motionless,
they double
as a breeding
ground for earth
and sky, their
cool, dark
origins beneath

the depths
of rock, in God's
holy language
called an *eye*

as if water
in such a place
required vision—
no celestial
body, but a voice
in a whirl-
wind, revealing
the marauding wings
of mother eagles,
their ravenous
fledglings defenseless
in these cliffs, high
above the womb
that begat ice . . .

3. JUDEAN HILLS

Here, you can rest
with open eyes . . .
this futile coupling
of rock and air
is, at least, incapable
of accusation,

devoid, as it is,
of even a skeletal

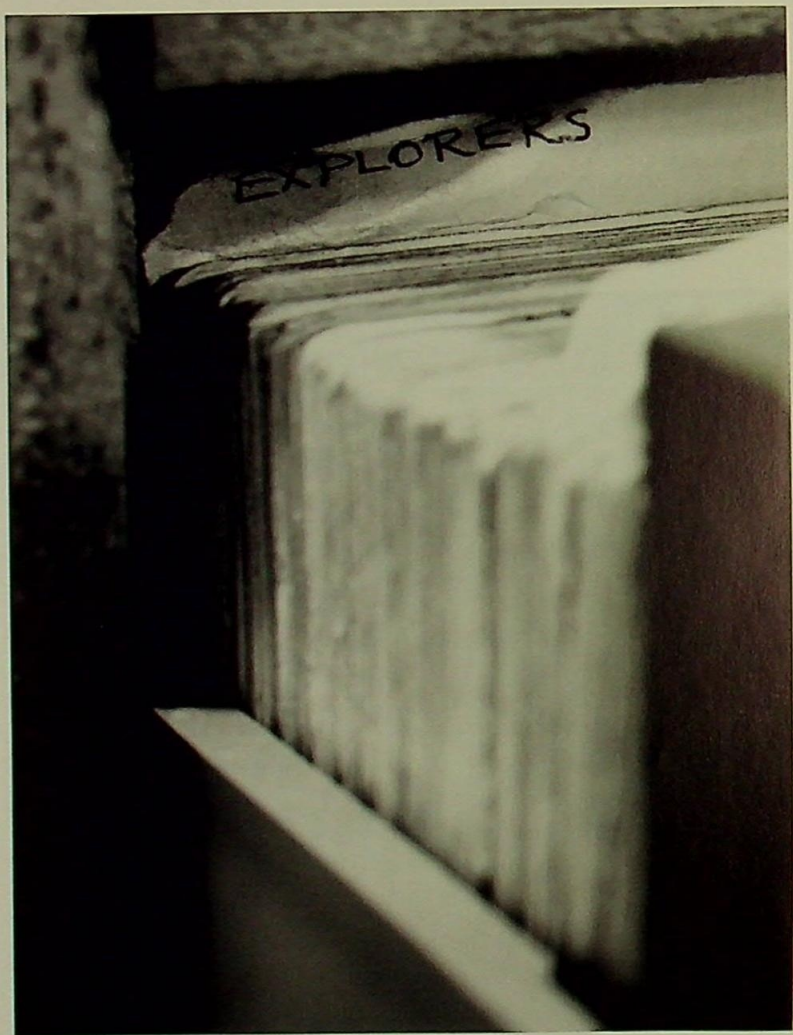
acacia, where a stray
parched animal
might scrounge
some shade,

as if to disclose
to my ungenerous
heart that it's not
the world's only
source of harshness . . .

and I'm so grateful
for this, grateful
for emptiness,
and that my whole
botched universe
is out of sight

that I'm even willing
to call this beautiful,
to wait for nightfall
and the extravagant
tales of stars . . .

Rest yourself, rest,
murmurs the empty-handed
horizon. . . . Jacob
fell asleep not far
from here . . . and he'd
committed far worse
crimes than yours . . .



JUBILAT PORTFOLIO
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERICA BAUM

Once...

Onassis, Jacqueline Kennedy, 1929-

Onassis, Jacqueline Kennedy, 1929-

Onassis, Jacqueline Kennedy, 1929-

Onassis, Jacqueline Kennedy, 1929-

Onassis, Jacqueline Kennedy, 1929-

118-12
A

Swans
Amputees

Dragon-flies

Moths

~~Tits~~ → Birds-Tits

Melons

Pomegranates

Grapes

Walnuts

Nasturtiums

~~Flying squirrels~~

~~Squirrels~~ See also

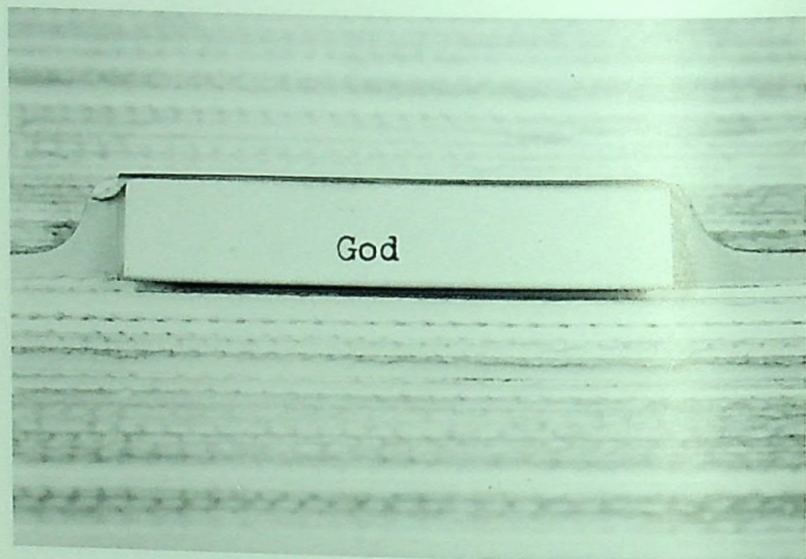
~~Squirrels, F~~

Squirrels, C
flying

Opossums
Persimmons

MR.

Mozart



These images are an exploration of library classificatory systems. Four photographs are from a photoarchive of Western art at the Frick Art Reference Library; they depict the cross-referencing notes—made on the back of each catalogue card—to the contents of a specific painting. Once photographed, the notes become isolated fragments, severed from their place as descriptive tools and categorical parts of an indexical system. They locate, instead, an imaginary destination.

All images by Erica Baum, 1997-8. Courtesy of D'Amelio Terras Gallery.

THE LOST EPIC
OF
ARTHUR DAVIDSON FICKE

THE AUTHOR'S ANNOTATIONS, COMMENTARY, AND
NOTES OF REFERENCE FOR
A MILLENIUM'S TEARDROP

Rescued by James Tate & Dara Wier

There is nothing that requires such gentle handling as an illusion. If one wishes to dispel it.

Sören Kierkegaard
The Point of View for My Work as an Author

PREFACE

Dear Reader,

The life of the epicist is by turns exhilarating and enervating. The nature of the form demands access to all one knows, all one has ever known and all one can know. No less will satisfy the omnivorous beast that is the true epic. So, when the muses visited me some fifteen years ago, I recognized in my submission to their call for a millennial epic that I would have to discover reserves within myself, even if I must excavate to grotesque depths and unleash horrid Chimerae that, in the end, would encompass the often staggeringly complex and always changing worlds of science, alongside the always tragic but sometimes heroic history of war, shadowed and highlighted by the redemptive spirit of the Arts, etc., until all merge and mingle in the epic struggle of people, just like you and me, to celebrate Creation and Life everlasting. This was the task, in sum, I had put before myself. With the humility of a dung beetle in the darkest corner of the Taj Mahal, I cleared my desk and set out to purchase the first of many reams of type paper.

In all honesty, my own family wasn't in the least bit interested when I first told them of my ambition. They mocked the scope of my project, said it could not be completed in one lifetime. My father, who has always seemed to me woefully weak in the areas of concentration and sticktoitiveness, spoke at breakfast of his preference for haiku. And this was of course meant as a dagger in my heart. My sister offered to correct my spelling from time to time. Only my dear mother understood, or at least said she did, the dire seriousness of my undertaking. My gratitude for the literally thousands of egg salad sandwiches she so lovingly provided can never be repaid or fully expressed. God rest her Soul.

And so, as they are wont to say, the days turned into weeks, the weeks into months, and months into years. I, myself, was amazed to observe my poem, my epic, spinning and spiraling ever outward. Try as I might at times, it would not be tamed. Eventually I scrawled a working title, A MILLENNIUM'S TEARDROP, and this helped me to organize the vast amounts of material and information bearing down on the poetic thrust. There were notes, too, indications of sources, either used by me or, as was often the case, toward which my own arguments and refutations aimed. Allusions as well as the occasional thefts were to be fully disclosed. Pedantry and intellectual hubris were to be avoided, if at all possible.

Increasingly, my sister, Elena, became envious as she watched the sheaves of manuscript mount. I worked at a large wooden table in my parents' basement under a single bare bulb, often taking no break at all for ten hour stretches. My father, an amateur entomologist, would often descend the long staircase on the pretext of locating an imagined cricket, or a moth he had dreamed up the night before. And I would continue my work right through his visits, though always aware of his eyes on the back of my neck. I had become a sort of monster myself, a monster of concentration. I wove my myriad threads through his blatant attempts at distraction and irritation. He and my sister, it is clear to me now, had united in a fiendish cabal to destroy my life's work. "Why," dear reader, you ask, "Why would anyone, much less a father and a sister, desire to sabotage a work of art so pure and, one humbly prayed, grand?" My answer to you is this: Some people simply can't stand to watch another fellow human being transcend the temporal nitpicky nonsense of their own day to day neurasthenia. They are as mice before the great visionary, nay, bugs.

From year to year I clung to my naive hope that in the end they too would transcend their petty, rancorous ways. The poem itself would lift them from the floor of that mildewy basement toward an enlightenment which had brushed my brow from time to time in the course of my labors.

I know of perfidy, but mostly from books. The mountain on my desk began to dwindle. But as I approached the closing passages of my ambitious work my concentration was so absolute I wouldn't have paid heed, no doubt, had a tarantula traversed my face. I was aflame with the joy of creation and often ignored the proffered egg salad sandwiches which still appeared beside me from time to time.

And in the end, there was nothing, nothing. A great peace descended on me, and not the homicidal rage one would have expected. I rejoined the family upstairs—Mother was no longer there, she had died or simply taken off. I will never know. Elena appeared old and waxy. She mumbled from time to time, but I could not understand.

Only recently did I discover that the Notes for A MILLENNIUM'S TEARDROP miraculously survived. Again, I might have wallowed in the irony of it all. I might have gagged on that irony and withered from the face of this earth. Finally, a talk with my dental hygienist cleared the way for a new thought—Go ahead, publish the Notes, as shards from the great palace that stood once, if only for a moment, before collapsing back into the earth from whence it had arisen. And thus I offer them to you now, dear reader, seeds from the great tree, or whatever metaphor you yourself would choose as emblem of the giving and the taking away, the building up and tearing down, that is the everlasting cycle to which we must inevitably bow.

CANTO I

(17) This word, though difficult to decipher, is surely "hums."

(93-115) See excellent discussion by B. A. Pearson, "Jewish Haggadic Traditions in the Testimony of Truth from Nag Hammadi," CG IX, 3" in *Ex Orbe Religiomum: Studia Geo Wildengren oblata* (Leiden, 1972) 458-470.

(178) An allusion to M. Maeterlinck's ground breaking study, *The Life of the White Ant*, Allen and Unwin, 1930.

(242-260) In no way do these lines intend to evoke unpleasant associations with Leo Frobenius's *Kulturgeschichte Afrikas*, Zurich, 1933.

(358) In the original, the word is *filosomudrie*, which combines the first part of the Greek word for "philosophy" with the second part of its Russian calque, *lyubomudrie*.

(412-414) For further elaboration on this thought, see B. C. Parker's intriguing essay "Rain as a Source of Vitamin B12," *Nature*, 219:617-18, 1968.

(572-577) These lines appeared to me verbatim written in Estee Lauder's Sunset Creme on a shattered mirror's face in Bruges, Belgium, in a dream.

(701) "Alien corn": echo of Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale."

(897) Benjamin says "Jetztzeit" and indicates by the quotation marks that he does not simply mean an equivalent to *Gegenwart*, which is present. He clearly is thinking of the mystical *nunc stans*.

(963-966) On August 4th, 1953, A. C. Glassell, Jr. caught a 1,560 lb. black marlin off the coast of Cabo Blanco, Peru.

CANTO II

(52-61) It was Hippolytus who referred to Aphrodite as "the lowest among the heavenly ones." What Gilgamesh said about Ishtar is of no interest whatsoever, at least in this passage.

(142-183) I realize I am guilty of a very summary treatment of the difficulty of reconciling lunar months with a solar year in this passage. So be it.

(240-241) The sense rather requires headgear of some kind.

(339-399) The guppy's angular "stance" varies, however, with the effects of different-coloured light and with the phases of the moon. At full moon the sensitivity to yellow light is at a maximum and to violet at a minimum.

(467) In 1990, the median price of an existing single-family home in Baton Rouge, La, was \$64,900.

(592) Martha's dog was mistakenly thought to be dying.

(681-683) In the photo showing Rimbaud in a garden cafe, one notices left of his feet a strange anamorphosis: a rock? the mask he dropped?

(748) *soodlr.* to linger, saunter.

(902-917) My sixth grade science teacher, Mrs. Xenia Dunbar (1897-1991), offered an after school program for gifted students who wished to pursue their understanding of etiolation. My greatest success occurred with johnny-jump-ups, whose ghostlike faces still haunt my house of memory.

(982) Except, of course, the accusation made against her when the Dauphin died.

CANTO III

(3) Madame de Sévigné used it a great deal, finding it "good against sadness" (cf. letters of October 16 and 20, 1675).

(188-203) Merle Haggard's album, *A Working Man Can't Get Nowhere Today*, was put together after Merle left Capitol. This is one of Merle's best—an amazing collection, including "I'm a White Boy," the ultimate redneck song (in both good and bad senses).

(211-291) Lines 211, 214, 219 and 231, in this order, are taken from p. 653, *Foreign Affairs*, "Stability in Asia," by Takashi Oka. The remainder of the passage owes its inspiration and most of its tone, language, syntax, point of view, detail, action and infrastructure to the beautiful poem, "How Saint Francis Bade Brother Ruffino Preach Naked, And After Did the Like Himself," by St. Francis, rendered into English by James Rhoades, Oxford University Press, 1925. The stanza's penultimate line is copied directly from my great-Uncle Lucian Otero's 1957 Federal Income tax form, Schedule D, p. 3.

(394) *Chaulmoogra*, tree from which oil used in the treatment of leprosy is extracted.

(468-480) Allan Robertson, first of the great golfers, was born in 1815.

(590-630) While living and working among the Walloons of southern Belgium in the years 1963-1964, I fell down a mine shaft and broke my neck.

(705-717) I wrote this passage *before* reading H. Mirabeau's *Observations d'un Voyageur Anglais* (Paris, 1788), and was later dumbstruck to read: "I knew, as

everyone did, that Bicetre was both hospital and prison; but I did not know that the hospital had been built to nurture sickness, the prison to nurture crime."

(819) In Schiller's literary ballad "Der Handschuh" (The Glove) (1798), a lady throws her glove into the lion's cage to test her lover; he retrieves it but then throws it at her face.

(986) On Dec. 18, 1957, Delmore Schwartz noted in his journal:
"I need that like a mouse needs a hatrack."

CANTO IV

(46-103) This passage, for all of its banal language and clichéd imagery, is one of my favorites. It abounds with misleading information and false insinuations of every sort. The thickness of the waist of the Statue of Liberty, for instance, is not 36 feet. It is 35 feet. But for a few moments one mad Saturday afternoon in April of 1957 I no longer cared!

(261-262) 927 A.D., Odo, Abbot of Cluny, established his code of discipline for Benedictines.

(352-360) My expression is that, *in* our existence in the hyphen, or of intermediateness between so-called opposites, there is no energy, and there is no matter: but there is _____, manifesting in different degrees of emphasis one way or the other. See *hyenaman*, Charles, Fort, (Dover, 1974, reprinted).

(431-436) See Cowper's "On Observing Some Names of Little Note in the *Biographia Britannia*." Dialectal meaning, "pull."

(386) "Puff-puffs": locomotives.

(649) The Hegelian term *aufheben* in its threefold meaning: to preserve, to elevate, to cancel.

(773-815) "I had made the decision," line 773 written by Harry S. Truman, taken from his memoirs, p. 421, *Year of Decisions*, 1955. Though I've liberally sprinkled the surrounding passages with phrases (and at times complete sentences) from Deane Waldman's several wholly commendable assessments of abstract expressionism, it was an incidental or (co)-incidental reading of Hugh Towers' *Time* review of the 1993 National Gallery's *The Greek Miracle: Classical Sculpture from the Dawn of Democracy* which confirmed my justifiably daring, nascent correlation tentatively hinted at in these lines.

(891-913) It is a pity that Maria's excellent suggestion was not carried out.

(968) It is really a mace.

CANTO V

(1-215) It may appear to the innocent reader that certain lines in this passage echo several paragraphs of S. A. Bedini's *The Scent of Time: A Study of the Use of Fire and Incense For Time Measurement in Oriental Countries*, American Philosophical Society, 1963, whereas, in truth, Professor Bedini shared a beach cottage with me on the island of Bimini during the Winter and Spring of 1959, and Bedini, according to our scrupulous and astute house cleaner, Miss Ruth Lee Jackson, on more than one occasion, no doubt after several lime rickeys, could not resist the temptation to peek into my work-in-progress, the epic itself, and I can only confess a certain sadness when his own long-awaited work finally appeared and my own thoughts and words appeared without the least acknowledgement or thanks. But revenge was

sweet when the reviewers scoffed at his hopelessly befogged and bewildering notions.

(343) General Ulysses S. Grant completed his memoirs four days before his death on July 23, 1885. The book realized over \$450,000.

(411) This "dame" is the fairy Vivian, "the lady of the lake."

(561) The Siberian tiger was still being widely hunted in Eastern Siberia and Manchuria as late as the 1930s.

(621) "Indian commas" is a euphemism for the cholera bacillus, *Vibrio cholerae*, which refers to its shape and its supposed origin in India.

(811-840) "She's a crisp echo of one of those efficient young ladies you see in the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company when you go in to talk about an annuity." Here, Joseph Noel, *Footlose in Arcadia* (1940), describes one of Jack London's staff of bodyservants. I, however, have taken the liberty to attribute it to my beagle in conversation with her therapist. In 1977, Lily was brutally killed by the new-dog-in-town, a vicious chow, unfortunately named White Fang.

(903) Reference to Remy de Gourmont's pithy admonition toward the end of *Philosophic Nights in Paris*: "Beware of violet. There is no more perfidious hue: it is, among the colors of life, the least stable and the most hypocritical."

CANTO VI

(5-107) On the continence of warriors, see also S. A. Cook's note in W. Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites* (London, 1927).

(230-240) The practice of putting up dummies to divert the attention of ghosts or demons from living people is, indeed, by no means uncommon.

(372) *Bondi Beach*, Australia's best-known surfing beach, at Waverly, a suburb of Sydney.

(401-442) "Pink wants to sit on six stools": quoted by Barry Pink in conversation with the author (he was perfectly sure that arse was the word Wittgenstein used).

(521) Here entomology and etymology are interchangeable. I cannot responsibly reconstruct from whence this transference sprang.

(613-651) Incorporating (in ((corpus)) pourous)) ((BIG BUSINESS)) (((PERFORATE))) ((YANG))) ELEMENTS (see A. Einstein, *Don't Ask Me*, p. 433, Princeton U. Press, 1948) of Helen Keller's bitter though tender reminiscences of her days with S. Clemens (see Twain, M. *Life on the Mississippi*, p. 1)) and Lorena A. Kickok's definitive biographical Keller study (Scholastic Book Services, 1962))) I attempted to recreate the moment Keller's and Twain's anima/animus as it/they experienced the insight (*sic*) which determined the trajectory of their respective *oeuvres*. A seminal book in my own locus, *Follow My Leader*, 1963, S. Press, Mary S. Blott, provided the foreground upon which this meditation germinated. (For specific entries, see p. 45, TSHOK, "Leaving Helen in the tree, Teacher hurried into the house to get some sandwiches.")

(719) This cat is a mere figure of speech.

(802-840) The population density of Mongolia is 3 persons per sq. mile.

(919-920) Bruno Schulz suffered from kidney-stone inflammations all his life.

(943) "She was descending from a height": Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 463-5.

CANTO VII

(65-98) In June of 1806, as the Lewis and Clark Expedition first reached the Great Falls on the Missouri River, Captain Meriwether Lewis noted in his journal, "The water, after descending, strikes against the butment . . . on which I stand and seems to reverberate; and being met by the more impetuous current, they roll and swell into half-formed billows of great height which rise and again disappear in an instant." It is my hope that both the stanzaic and metrical underpinnings of this section echo Lewis's description. Much has already been made of the taste for dog this party acquired. Toussaint Charbonneau has need described as a "minus function," and a "poor specimen, consisting chiefly of a tongue to wag in a mouth to fill." See also *Sacajawea: The Unsung Heroine of Montana*, Armstead, 1915.

(142-169) It is not impossible that this entry was occasioned by pathogenic shock. The form which relates it to Baudelaire's work is all the more revealing.

(253) The most famous of the tree fungi is the Liver Fistulina (Fistulina Hepatica), commonly known in Europe as "Oak Tongue," "Beefsteak Fungus," "Vegetable Beefsteak," "Beef Tongue," etc.

(418-420) "Circumcise the foreskin of your heart. . . ." (Deut 10:16). This was personally very painful for me to accept, and I did my damndest through the years 1951-1956 to ignore this advice.

(612) Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysil iogogogo: the full name of Llanfair in northwest Wales on the Isle of Anglesey. The name

means: "The church place of St. Mary by the pool of the white hazel by the rapid whirlpool of the church of St. Silligog of the red cave."

(729) Snowball, mixture of Advocaat and a lemon drink. Not recommended for an amateur.

(884) Chekhov believed that rattlesnakes could be found on the banks of the Nile.

(923) By 1924 there were 2.5 million radios in use in the U.S.

CANTO VIII

(123-172) I was very hungry when I wrote these lines, which is my only justification for the reference to "Iceland Moss." It is, however, a nutritious lichen gathered chiefly in Norway and Iceland. The moss is often dried, ground into flour and made into bread, but elsewhere it is generally made into a decoction or jelly and as such is considered a valuable article of diet for invalids and children, and a useful and popular demulcent and emollient in throat and pulmonary affections.

(213) Absinthe is typically flavored with wormwood or anise and other aromatics. Abstinence is used here in the strictly theological definition. *Obstinant, pertinacious, dogged*—these words made up a full 80% of my father's vocabulary.

(351-367) 14. Mean Annual Snowfall of Sault Ste. Marie: 114 inches!

(455-521) The logical accuracy of this seeming doggerel can be proven by collapsing and exposing the sequence and syntax of these passages: p. 105, paragraph I, *Synchronicity*, C. G. Jung, Princeton U. Press, 1973; and p. 173,

paragraph I, *A History of Philosophy*: Volume I, Greece & Rome, Part II, Frederick Copleston, S.J., Image Books, 1962. The morning before I set myself the grave task of risking this style, a note arrived from my private physician's lab technician gently, though gravely, confirming I and my physician's fear that I had indeed entered into the borderline zone of high-cholesterol intake. Having always subscribed to the profundity, "You Are What You Write," I consciously exercised extreme self-denial and practiced a stripped-down, unadorned diction.

(663) Smallpox existed in China as early as 1700 B.C., according to Paschen.

(730-731) Both of them represent the iris, but whereas the French one has only the leaves, the Florentine one has both leaves and flowers.

(851-907) These lines were written in blind rage as a rebuttal to Karl Abraham's 1927 published essay, "A Short Study in the Development of the Libido, Viewed in the Light of Mental Disorders." Karl Abraham was a very sick and disgusting human being and I exhort my readers to boycott any recognition of this maladjusted nincompoop's loathsome scribblings.

CANTO IX

(1-375) In the decade of the 1980s I traveled extensively throughout our five continents and two hemispheres recording incidents of puppet or propped, shadow or shattered, totalitarian governments' handling of the import/export orchid trade. (See lines 3, 17, 54, 187 and 213 for cryptic but nonetheless damning evidence of documented actions of extortion, orchid-napping, sexual harassment.) My paternal grandmother, who must go unnamed, is said to have preserved my first corsage, a simple *orchidacca*, to the eternal befuddlement of my grandfather, in the cheese drawer of her

1959 Frigidaire. Grants for the travel this poem demanded were provided by U.S. Manufacturers, Goodyear Tire, The Ingodwe Trust (a consortium dedicated to bringing orchid cultivation back to the people) and the NRA, without whose generous support and encouragement this important passage would have gone unwritten. Thanks to R. Nelson for lines 18-53. This passage is dedicated to airline hostesses everywhere. *We are sisters.*

(463-465) The rules of cricket were first drawn up in 1774. This simple fact continues to amaze me, but 'tis true!

(597) A trough over 9,000 meters deep in the Pacific, southwest of Guam.

(703-758) In 1891, W.L. Judson (U.S.) invented the clothing zipper though, inexplicably, it was not in practical use until 1919. By that time American railroad lines operated in a total of 265,000 miles. I suspect foul play.

(829-847) Fatefully, about that time, I started out for the Rotary Club in St. Louis, daydreamed at the wheel of the car, became lost, and took Illinois Highway 100 into Kampsville.

(902-1000) On a frigidly foggy evening in November, 1983, I looked up from these pages and literally believed I saw "the one single, solitary forbidden wall of white driven forever on against sight." I called a taxi immediately, instructing the driver to take me to Joke City where I could recover a semblance of reality. During the course of our brief, though as you must understand momentous, trip, my driver asked me if I knew that Sri Sri Sri Sri Sri Tribhubana Bir Bikram Jung Bahadur Shah Bahadur Shum Shere Jung Deva ascended the throne in 1911 when he was but five. This accounts for the moody melody of much of the rest of this passage.

CANTO X

(7) It is estimated that there were more than 75 million buffalo on the plains and prairies of America before the white man arrived.

(148-200) After careful examination of Karl W. Butzer's paper, "Geomorphology of the Lower Illinois Valley as a Spatial Temporal Context for the Koster Archaic Site," (1977), I drove immediately to a Dairy Queen in an adjacent state, no need to mention it by name here, ate two footlong chili dogs, and decided there and then to abandon this line of development. It seemed somehow shabby to me to suggest that the American Middle West was a hotbed of advanced civilization more than 7000 years before the birth of Christ, at least 4000 years before Stonehenge was constructed, more than 1400 years before the great pyramids were erected. But shabby has been right before.

(306) *Smoke*, the name for London, also called the Great (or Big) Smoke.

(444) "Can you imagine a roast aardvark without an apple in its mouth? It's like a martini without the egg." Gomez Addams.

(516-592) The operation was performed not by a veterinarian, but by a famous surgeon in Richmond.

(734-736) Marble for the Lincoln Memorial was taken from Marble's quarries from 1914-1916. In the summer of 1989 I witnessed the demise of a dirt-biker who fell from the quarry path into the Little Crystal River, after executing a rather inane stunt for the benefit of his companion. He took the plunge just seconds after brushing up against my satchel of provisions and notebooks.

(962-989) While I am in basic disagreement with the central thesis of H. Timourian's essay, "Symbiotic Emergence of Metazoans," *Nature*, 266: 283-84, 1970, a quick reading of it may be necessary for the complete understanding of this crucial passage. (Just as a footnote, let me add that Timourian, shortly after publishing the above-mentioned essay, took his own life in a ghastly way—by forcing his little dog and companion of nearly twenty years, a Kendoric pug, to yank his heart out! Enough said.)

(991) The population of the town fluctuated: 1895, 200; 1908, 150; 1909, 700; 1910, 1,200; 1913, 1,400; 1917, 1,400; 1918, 100; 1943, 0; 1959, 0; 1965, 0.

CANTO XI

(52-58) The money difficulties being got rid of, at least for a time, the Italian journey in search of the lion's skin could now come off.

(141-151) Refer to Anderson's "The Pixy and the Grocer." "Everything in the whole house that he put his tongue on was given the power of speech; they could only speak one at a time, which was a blessing."

(280-292) Misquoted from Lansdowne's *Drinking Song to Sleep*.

(339) Affectionate moniker of the militant mystics of the Hindu Kush mountains.

(476-493) Christ. As elsewhere in this passage, I interpret the commandment positively, less as a warning against bearing false witness than as encouragement to bear witness to truth.

(590-638) Eruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*, T. G. Rosenmeyer, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953). I was well along into the ideas and material of this passage before knowing of Snell's parallel work on Homeric language. Our conclusions, however, are quite different.

(702-703) The *exus* (demons) or, if female, *pombagiros* (turning pigeons), spirits of wicked foreigners, whose mediums make vulgar and aggressive suggestions.

(859-910) The phrasing here is that of Marcel Kinsbourne in "The Control of Attention by Interaction Between Cerebral Hemispheres," *Fourth International Symposium on Attention and Performance*, Boulder, Colorado, August 1971.

(939) It was said that bees clustered on the lips of the infant Pindar, thus foretelling his greatness as a lyric poet.

(993) Ulcer shaped like a pipe.

CANTO XII

(25) The African equivalent of beatniks or teddyboys.

(347-385) The traditional view—though I dedicate these lines to opposing it—attributes the extirpation of carnivorous marsupials to the general inferiority of pouched versus placental animals.

(389) Sulpicia, Roman poetess, late 1st century B.C.

(516) *Interlinear to Cabeza de Vaca*, Frontier Press, handset Perpetua on Mohawk Vellum, 1969.

(675-700) Judah P. Benjamin, the complicated vice-president of the Confederacy, left his decaying mansion on the banks of the Mississippi River pretty much intact. Apparently no one cared to plunder much less catalog it. I, and my little Mexican Hairless, Titito, had been sent for a summer visit to the home of my mother's great-aunt (who wishes to remain unnamed). One morning I awoke from a frightening dream aware that Titito no longer slept peacefully at my feet. I frantically began running up and down the road, calling, hoping, calling. I heard an oddly plaintive plinking coming from the ruins of the Benjamin mansion and there to my great relief and astonishment I found Titito thumping his tail against the rusting, exposed strings of a piano harp, a pool of sunlight radiating his sharp little teeth.

(709) In this sense, the experience of madness exhibits a rigorous continuity with the experience of leprosy. The ritual of the leper's exclusion showed that he was, as a living man, the very presence of death.

(734) It is generally known that Samuel Johnson remained particularly aggravated by the story of an epitaph he wrote at the age of three for a duck.

(802-815) Found a stone on the stairs?

(886) To find a dead crow in the road is lucky, but to happen upon a carrion crow is superlative good fortune. There is a good deal of confusion in the Ozarks about the whippoorwill.

(996) i.e. gnawn and eaten by the tooth of the caterpillar treason.

POSTSCRIPT

Thus situated among the great forces of history, my chronicle submitted itself, not to mention me, to the clarion caprice and vagary of destiny.

What has become of A MILLENNIUM'S TEARDROP is not unlike what will become of us all. For years this simple analog eluded me; I was tossed about by furtive and ultimately futile delusions. Daily I haunted my dear mother's memory, imploring her to answer my questions, my "prayers." Why had life been so unfair—a question, had I but access to my own epic, I could have dispensed with a flyswatter.

My sister . . . how to approach the delicate nature of our unresolved and inescapable relation? She had once called me her little cinquecentist. I understood it to be the highest compliment. I was deeply touched that she could pronounce it.

During the interminable years of my vassalage I was incapable of harboring a petty thought. Humbly I bore witness to the mammoth and sometimes spectral assemblies of man's knowledge and intuition, our realized and only hinted at notes of convergence with ourselves through the ages, with celestial vitality ad infinitum.

I did not once believe I could satisfy my task or do less than strive for the inhuman versatility this struggle demanded. To disclose without equivocation the common sense right along with the terrible depths of pathos and profundity, the horse sense in tandem with all of our shimmering humors, this would seem to have by necessity torn me into ten thousand shreds of mute quiescence. It did not, and I take no credit.

At times I excoriated the forces which caused me to rank myself with the shamelessly immodest, the unblushing, obscene ranks of others like me, who did not retreat or capitulate even when evidence of failure overwhelmed all hope, who did not whine or cast about through the ragbags of excuses life casually and unrelentingly provided.

Yet I remained humble. I had no excuses. And even when fate or human foible intervened with a hand so stealthy as to be nearly invisible, I refrained from vindictiveness or revenge. I might have run amok with the rampancy and passion of a berserk nihilist. Which I was not. How could I be? After all I'd beheld, neither Solomon nor Athena, neither Confucius nor Zoroaster could have convinced me I'd been a foolhardy pioneer. Nothing could persuade me to renounce my regimen or waiver in my progress. I had become like the great rivers moving onward toward their inevitable conclusions.

Later when it became apparent, when it was undeniable, that someone or something deemed my epic to take its place among all of the lost and evaporated wonders of creation, a sympathetic and distinguished majority of my few, closest confidants implored me to begin anew, to make mine the chore of reconstituting the record of my solitary meditation.

With all due respect for their hopes, I barely considered this alternative. By now I knew too much, had suffered and understood what little my suffering amounted to in comparison with the anguish of our afflicted and miserable tribe, how a work such as I'd fulfilled could not be duplicated. Besides, I'd long ago put aside my arguments with Plato. He meant no more to me than Pluto, the planet.

My own father took my loss in stride and not surprisingly as an occasion to deliver a series of homely sermonettes on the familial and civic duties associated with taking one's place among the workers of the world. It would

seem he anticipated my rise from the cellar to signal my fall into the hands of a society rife with the very rot my epic strove to rise above. I had no intention of getting a job. It is a full measure of his misunderstanding of me and of A MILLENNIUM'S TEARDROP that his consolation came in the form of offering to lend me his tattered copy of *Durgeson's Personality Battery: One Hundred and Fifty Questions to Ask Yourself If You Don't Know Who You Really Are*.

When on a rare occasion my father has heard me mutter complaints that all my work has been in vain, he cannot resist saying to me, "Other horrible workers will come; they will begin from the horizons where you collapsed." The first few times I actually believed he intended to console me. I was too weak and in need of comforting to discern the baneful spark in his eye, and later when I realized my mistake, I rose above the taunt and replied simply, "I'm sure you are right, father."

It is perhaps not surprising that I often chose to picture in my mind the burning of the great library of Alexandria as an inducement to sleep—the four-hundred thousand scrolls curling and crackling in the delicious flames, the knowledge, wisdom and poetry, astronomy, mathematics, religious laws trickling back into darkness and silence. It is on these nights that I sleep, not like a baby—a baby has fears and hungers—but like a stone.

from AURORA

Pura López Colomé

This world.

A sound sometimes dry,
metallic, at
times rubbery,
has calmed the morning for good.
Has darkened little by little
the songs of various birds,
the croak of the daily,
wind in the hedges,
the green yearning.
A man places with inexhaustible precision
one tile after another on the roof of the house.
He must be the owner.
His work is like no other,
constant, intended, without refrain.
The noise he makes won't echo, but will
veer off,
off in search of the dawn.
Those who live below,
they are turning into recurrent
voices, feeding on themselves
beneath the roof.

VI

Dawn,
your eyes are the air.
They take themselves
in and become aware
of themselves in the hollow of an echo.
That, there.

You come to the world
drinking it in, for the most part,
with each breath.
You've dredged that lagoon
of smiles, surprises,
fear, weeping, mystery: and now,
from between your lips the name of things
is pouring.

X

Again an emptiness pierces everything
and converts it to an emblem,
ether, human mutability.

*Nothing alters the apparent
mitigation of faith.*

*Happiness
is fleeting.*

Dust so fine.

Just as I'm about to come across
your voice in this place lush
with natural beauty,
you, being immune,
go on, inapprehendable,
a horse stepping over
the shadow of some hoofprints
hidden in the turmoil
of my skull.

Upon transfiguring

After that haze,

the air's pure spring
opens into a ventricular flower,
fully illuminating
the passage.

Welcome.

You will pour out
a ceaseless longing,
an eternal hope,
may it happen,
may it be born,
may it be reborn.

Maybe you will figure out the expected route.
Maybe you will take the way of ardor,
free already
from your aching body.
Maybe you will open into pleasure.

You will be blessed.

Let me dream
your substance indissoluble,
touch the face of beginning,
return as myself, to myself,
always wakeful.

—translated from the Spanish by Forrest Gander

THE BEAUFORT SCALE OF CELESTIAL HIERARCHY

Cormin Ericson

Called Back

I have had it with Asphodel, Fontanel, White Flag, et al.
I am peaceably congregating my minions
at the bed's skirting.

They are honey-handed traipsers,
sooty, toothsome, touch and go,
slip into something comfortable plug-uglies;

whole perseids
of presynaptic aspirin-flavored attendants
venomous with aid.

Very roughly, they amount
to a defrocked, jittery theory, a phase,
a fling with a towardly orrery.

It's time for the darlings to meet their maker.
When they come and circle and opprobriously
collapse, they will be dissected and released.

Virtues: Leaves and twigs swirl; wind extends light flag.
Thrones: Whole trees in motion; inconvenience found in walking.
Seraphim: Very rarely experienced; widespread damage occurs.

from NECESSITIES

Christopher Merrill

Blame it on the scimitars, not the scientific method, we told the professors after setting the field ablaze with a magnifying glass. Yet we were ashamed to read the signs posted by the farmer, warning hunters about the canisters of toxic waste buried on his land. It was elk season, the buglers' busiest time: we kept mistaking taps for mating calls. What had we bagged so far? A bicycle and a bear. The newspapers printed color photographs of famous lovers to clear up our confusion. Nothing helped. The burning field resembled an ammunition dump—one explosion after another. We would have to conduct our studies elsewhere, if we hoped to keep our thesis secret until we had followed the tracks to a cave in the mountains. Our prey was either language or style, it was too soon to decide which. A drummer beat time at the edge of the field. Thousands of soldiers were shadowboxing with their mistresses. The professors sharpened their swords. We moved in to take a closer look.

Shoot the horse—that's what the blacksmith thinks, limping to his truck. The white mare tied to the apple tree rises on its hind legs, parting the waves of blood, stubble, and fallen fruit. The frost remains a stained glass window giving on to the future. Giving? It takes from the past, which includes last night's snow clouds, this morning's argument over the clergy's role in politics, and what caught the blacksmith's attention just before he was kicked. Only the rope tethering the mare belongs to the present, and it—the rope, the present—is fraying at both ends. Likewise the blacksmith's nerves: his followers, awaiting his instructions, stand at the edge of a sea that dried up a thousand years ago. Yet we shield our eyes when the priest in the prompter's box shouts: *Too many actors in the capital!* He's the stage manager of a bankrupt theater, and he believes in nothing now—not the Epiphany, nor the afterlife, nor even the most obvious signs of stagecraft in the shaping of our destiny:

abandoned cities; dying forests and lakes; histrionics in *The Pharmacy of God*. Winter figures into one of the priest's cues or equations, though he no longer remembers why. Nor can we explain our elation when we learned the elections had been canceled. Give the blacksmith something besides a pistol for his pain, then take from him all the spiritual choices arriving in glass coaches at dusk, which overwhelm us with kindness. Where should we look for the tables of stone? Will they mention the horse and tree? Which window should we open tonight? And the sea—what happened to the sea? These are the questions we should have answered before the lights began to dim. The curtains rise on an empty stage. The clouds in the backdrop resemble cassocks. And the actors waiting in the wings will never finish the penal code, or lead us out of the temptation to forget the past, or organize the exodus across the desert. The rope's about to break: there will be no more dress rehearsals.

from the JUBILATE AGNO

Christopher Smart

For there is no Height in which there are not flowers.

For flowers have great virtues for all the senses.

For the flower glorifies God and the foot parries the adversary.

For the flowers have their angels even the words of God's Creation.

For the warp and woof of flowers are worked by perpetual moving spirits.

For flowers are good both for the living and the dead.

For there is a language of flowers.

For there is a sound reasoning upon all flowers.

For the elegant phrases are nothing but flowers.

For flowers are medicinal.

For flowers are musical in ocular harmony.

For the right names of flowers are yet in heaven. God make gard'ner's better nomenclatures.

For the Poorman's nosegay is an introduction to a Prince.

For A is the beginning of learning and the door of heaven.

For B is a creature busy and bustling.

For C is a sense quick and penetrating.

For D is depth.

For E is eternity—such is the power of the English letters taken singly.

For F is faith.

For G is God—whom I pray to be gracious to Livemore my fellow prisoner.

For H is not a letter, but a spirit—Benedicatur Jesus Christus, sic spirem!

For I is identity. God be gracious to Henry Hatsell.

For K is king.

For L is love. God in every language.

For M is music and Hebrew מ is the direct figure of God's harp.

For N is new.

For O is open.

For P is power.

For Q is quick.

For R is right.

For S is soul.

For T is truth. God be gracious to Jermyn Pratt and to Harriote his Sister.

For U is unity, and his right name is Uve to work it double.

For W is word.

For X is hope—consisting of two check G—God be gracious to Anne Hope.

For Y is yea. God be gracious to Bennet and his family!

For Z is zeal.

*For in the education of children it is necessary to watch the words, which they pronounce
with difficulty, for such are against them in their consequences.*

For A is awe, if pronounced full. Stand in awe and sin not.

For B pronounced in the animal is bey importing authority.

For C pronounced hard is ke importing to shut.

For D pronounced full is day.

For E is east particularly when formed little e with his eye.

For F in its secondary meaning is fair.

For G in a secondary sense is good.

For H is heave.

For I is the organ of vision.

For K is keep.

For L is light, and ♪ is the line of beauty.

For M is meet.

For N is nay.

For O is over.

For P is peace.

For Q is quarter.

For R is rain, or thus reign, or thus rein.

For S is save.

For T is take.

For V is veil.

For W is world.

For X beginneth not, but connects and continues.

For Y is young—the Lord direct me in the better way of going on in the Fifth year of my jeopardy June the 17th N.S. 1760. God be gracious to Dr YOUNG.

For Z is zest. God give us all a relish of our duty.

For Action and Speaking are one according to God and the Ancients.

For the approaches of Death are by illumination.

For a man cannot have Public Spirit, who is void of private benevolence.

For the order of Alamoith is first three, second six, third eighteen, fourth fifty four, and then the whole band.

For the order of Sheminiith is first ten, second twenty, third thirty and then the whole band.

For the first entrance into Heaven is by complement.
For Flowers can see, and Pope's Carnations knew him.
For the devil works upon damps and lowth and causes agues.
For ignorance is a sin, because illumination is to be had by prayer.
For many a genius being lost at the plough is a false thought—the divine providence is a better manager.
For a man's idleness is the fruit of the adversary's diligence.
For diligence is the gift of God, as well as other good things.
For it is a good NOTHING in one's own eyes and in the eyes of fools.
For aera in its primitive sense is but a weed amongst corn.
For Jacob's brown sheep wore the Golden fleece.
For Shaving of the face was the invention of the Sodomites to make men look like women.
For God has given us a language of monosyllables to prevent our clipping.
For a toad enjoys a finer prospect than another creature to compensate his lack.
 Tho' toad I am the object of man's hate.
 Yet better am I than a reprobate. (who has the worst of prospects).
For there are stones, whose constituent particles are little toads.
For the spiritual music is as follows.
For there is the thunder-stop, which is the voice of God direct.
For the rest of the stops are by their rhymes.
For the trumpet rhymes are sound bound, soar more and the like.
For the Shawn rhymes are lawn fawn moon boon and the like.
For the harp rhymes are sing ring string and the like.
For the cymbal rhymes are bell well toll soul and the like.
For the flute rhymes are tooth youth suit mute and the like.

For the dulcimer rhymes are grace place beat heat and the like.
 For the Clarinet rhymes are clean seen and the like.
 For the Bassoon rhymes are pass, class and the like. God be gracious to Baumgarden.
 For the dulcimer are rather van fan and the like and grace place &c are of the bassoon.
 For the beat heat, weep peep &c are of the pipe.
 For every word has its marrow in the English tongue for order and for delight.
 For the dissyllables such as able table &c are the fiddle rhymes.
 For all dissyllables and some trissyllables are fiddle rhymes.
 For the relations of words are in pairs first.
 For the relations of words are sometimes in oppositions.
 For the relations of words are according to their distances from the pair.
 For there be twelve cardinal virtues the gifts of the twelve sons of Jacob.
 For Reuben is Great. God be gracious to Lord Falmouth.
 For Simeon is Valiant. God be gracious to the Duke of Somerset.
 For Levi is Pious. God be gracious to the Bishop of London.
 For Judah is Good. God be gracious to Lord Granville.
 For Dan is Clean—neat, dextrous, apt, active, compact. God be gracious to Draper.
 For Naphtali is sublime—God be gracious to Chesterfield.
 For God is Contemplative—God be gracious to Lord Northampton.
 For Ashur is Happy—God be gracious to George Bowes.
 For Issachar is strong—God be gracious to the Duke of 6 Dorsett.
 For Zabulon is Constant—God be gracious to Lord Bath.
 For Joseph is Pleasant—God be gracious to Lord Bolingbroke.
 For Benjamin is Wise—God be gracious to Honeywood.

For all Foundation is from God depending.
For the two Universities are the Eyes of England.
For Cambridge is the right and the brightest.
For Pembroke Hall was founded more in the Lord than any College in Cambridge.
For mustard is the proper food of birds and men are bound to cultivate it for their use.
For they that study the works of God are peculiarly assisted by his Spirit.
For all the creatures mention'd by Pliny are somewhere or other extant to the glory of God.
For Rye is food rather for fowls than men.
For Rye-bread is not taken with thankfulness.
For the lack of Rye may be supplied by Spelt.
For languages work into one another by their bearings.
For the power of some animal is predominant in every language.
For the power and spirit of a CAT is in the Greek.
For the sound of a cat is in the most useful preposition $\chi\alpha\tau'$ $\epsilon\upsilon\chi\eta\nu$.
For the pleasantry of a cat at pranks is in the language ten thousand times over.
For JACK UPON PRANCK is in the performance of $\pi\epsilon\varsigma\iota$ together or separate.
For Clapperclaw is in the grappling of the words upon one another in all the modes of versification.
For the Greek is thrown from heaven and falls upon its feet.
For the Greek when distracted from the line is sooner restored to rank and rallied into some form than any other.
For his cry is in $\omicron\upsilon\upsilon\alpha\iota$ which I am sorry for.
For the Mouse (Mus) prevails in the Latin.
For Edi-mus, bibi-mus, vivi-mus—ore-mus.
For the Mouse is a creature of great personal valour.

For—this is a true case—Cat takes female mouse from the company of male—male mouse will not depart, but stands threat'ning and daring.

For this is as much as to challenge, if you will let her go, I will engage you, as prodigious a creature as you are.

For the Mouse is of an hospitable disposition.

For bravery and hospitality were said and done by the Romans rather than others.

For two creatures the Bull and the Dog prevail in the English.

For all the words ending in -ble are in the creature. Invisi-ble, Incomprehen-si-ble, ineffa-ble, A-ble.

For the Greek and Latin are not dead languages, but taken up and accepted for the sake of him that spoke them.

For can is (canis) is cause and effect a dog.

For the English is concise and strong. Dog and Bull again.

For the colours are spiritual.

For WHITE is the first and the best.

For there are many intermediate colours, before you come to SILVER.

For the next colour is a lively GREY.

For the next colour is BLUE.

For the next is GREEN of which there are ten thousand distinct sorts.

For the next is YELLOW which is more excellent than red, tho' Newton makes red the prime. God be gracious to John Delap.

For RED is the next working round the Orange.

For Red is of sundry sorts till it deepens to BLACK.

For black blooms and it is PURPLE.

For purple works off to BROWN which is of ten thousand acceptable shades.

For the next is PALE. God be gracious to William Whitehead.

For pale works about to White again.

*NOW that colour is spiritual appears inasmuch as the blessing of God upon all things
descends in colour.*

For the blessing of health upon the human face is in colour.

For the blessing of God upon purity is in the Virgin's blushes.

For the blessing of God in colour is on him that keeps his virgin.

For I saw a blush in Staindrop Church, which was of God's own colouring.

For it was the benevolence of a virgin shewn to me before the whole congregation.

*For the blessing of God upon the grass is in shades of Green visible to a nice observer as
they light upon the surface of the earth.*

For the blessing of God unto perfection in all bloom and fruit is by colouring.

For from hence something in the spirit may be taken off by painters.

For Painting is a species of idolatry, tho' not so gross as statuary.

For it is not good to look with earning upon any dead work.

For by so doing something is lost in the spirit and given from life to death.

*For BULL in the first place is the word of Almighty God. For he is a creature of infinite
magnitude in the height.*

For there is the model of every beast of the field in the height.

For they are blessed intelligences and all angels of the living God.

For there are many words under Bull.

For Bul the Month is under it.

For Sea is under Bull.

For Brook is under Bull. God be gracious to Lord Bolingbroke.

For Rock is under Bull.

For Bullfinch is under Bull. God be gracious to the Duke of Cleveland.

For God, which always keeps his work in view has painted a Bullfinch in the heart of a stone. God be gracious to Gosling and Canterbury.

For the Bluecap is under Bull.

For the Humming Bird is under Bull.

For Beetle is under Bull.

For Toad is under bull.

For Frog is under Bull, which he has a delight to look at.

For the Pheasant-eyed Pink is under Bull. Blessed Jesus RANK EL.

For Bugloss is under Bull.

For Bugle is under Bull.

For Oxeye is under Bull.

For Fire is under Bull.

For I will consider my Cat Jeffry.

For he is the servant of the Living God duly and daily serving him.

For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way.

For this is done by wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness.

For then he leaps up to catch the musk, which is the blessing of God upon his prayer.

For he rolls upon prank to work it in.

For having done duty and received blessing he begins to consider himself.

For this he performs in ten degrees.

For first he looks upon his fore-paws to see if they are clean.

For secondly he kicks up behind to clear away there.

For thirdly he works it upon stretch with the fore-paws extended.

For fourthly he sharpens his paws by wood.

For fifthly he washes himself.

For Sixtibly he rolls upon wash.
For Seventibly he fleas himself, that he may not be interrupted upon the beat.
For Eightibly he Tubs himself against a post.
For Ninthibly he looks up for his instructions.
For Tenthibly he goes in quest of food.
For having consider'd God and himself he will consider his neighbour.
For if he meets another cat he will kiss her in kindness.
For when he takes his prey he plays with it to give it chance.
For one mouse in seven escapes by his dallying.
For when his day's work is done his business more properly begins.
For he keeps the Lord's watch in the night against the adversary.
For he counteracts the powers of darkness by his electrical skin and glaring eyes.
For he counteracts the Devil, who is death, by brisking about the life.
For in his morning orisons he loves the sun and the sun loves him.
For he is of the tribe of Tiger.
For the Cherub Cat is a term of the Angel Tiger.
For he has the subtlety and hissing of a serpent, which in goodness he suppresses.
For he will not do destruction, if he is well-fed, neither will he spit without provocation.
For he purrs in thankfulness, when God tells him he's a good Cat.
For he is an instrument for the children to learn benevolence upon.
For every house is incomplete without him and a blessing is lacking in the spirit.
For the Lord commanded Moses concerning the cats at the departure of the Children of Israel from Egypt.
For every family had one cat at least in the bag.
For the English Cats are the best in Europe.

For he is the cleanest in the use of his fore-paws of any quadrupede.
For the dexterity of his defence is an instance of the love of God to him exceedingly.
For he is the quickest to his mark of any creature.
For he is tenacious of his point.
For he is a mixture of gravity and waggery.
For he knows that God is his Saviour.
For there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at rest.
For there is nothing brisker than his life when in motion.
For he is of the Lord's poor and so indeed is he called by benevolence perpetually—
Poor Jeoffry! poor Jeoffry! the rat has bit thy throat.
For I bless the name of the Lord Jesus that Jeoffry is better.
For the divine spirit comes about his body to sustain it in complete cat.
For his tongue is exceeding pure so that it has in purity what it wants in music.
For he is docile and can learn certain things.
For he can set up with gravity which is patience upon approbation.
For he can fetch and carry, which is patience in employment.
For he can jump over a stick which is patience upon proof positive.
For he can spraggle upon waggle at the word of command.
For he can jump from an eminence into his master's bosom.
For he can catch the cork and toss it again.
For he is bated by the hypocrite and miser.
For the former is afraid of detection.
For the latter refuses the charge.
For he camels his back to bear the first notion of business.
For he is good to think on, if a man would express himself neatly.

*For he made a great figure in Egypt for his signal services.
For he killed the Ichneumon-rat very pernicious by land.
For his ears are so acute that they sting again.
For from this proceeds the passing quickness of his attention.
For by stroking of him I have found out electricity.
For I perceived God's light about him both wax and fire.
For the Electrical fire is the spiritual substance, which God sends from heaven to sustain the
bodies both of man and beast.
For God has blessed him in the variety of his movements.
For, tho' he cannot fly, he is an excellent clamberer.
For his motions upon the face of the earth are more than any other quadrupede.
For he can tread to all the measures upon the music.
For he can swim for life.
For he can creep.*

SCRIP

Heather McHugh

The taxonomy comes free with the unit.
The unit comes free with the wrench.
The wrench comes free with
the hand. The hand comes

(monkey with me, said
the header) under the
pen-man's custody.

MY ONE

and only: money

minus one. No noun
like a pronoun!—best of all

the jealous kind. Come, come,
company doll, cide with a coin,

one moan, one
more, honey

bunch.

PAINTING (ENTITLED BEACH DEBRIS) IN PROCESS TOWARD EXPERIENCE

Claudia Rankine

The painting, Liv knows, has to be truer than its reflection.

The painter must be erased though the painting is saturated by what is felt, what is seen by the erased face.

Her eyes have looked so hard the painting turns to acknowledge the space surviving her departed face.

In her eyes the turning grows solemn as she approaches the recognition she feels beckons her.

She knows the moment, experiences it as beach, beach debris.

You, she says to the quiet reflecting her absorbed face, hold on, hold on differently.

And though she approaches willingly the gaping enigma smoke-shading the vast space, its eroding shoreline,

her darkened heel, penciled in, relinquishes movement.

Or is the self (she paints) insulated from suspense because it has been handheld, occupied by everyone.

She paints the sea lighter than its fears, its cloud-lined exterior housing all that has been erased in the erased face.

She paints gray the wind she breathes into. Beyond the sand, the land swells into the existence that is herself.

Then the sea wants to slip along its jagged shoreline, out of its mouth onto

the beach beneath her heels. Beneath her heels, this beach, its beach debris.

Triangulated is this image.

I think I am open to experiencing this but I remain suspicious of landscape that is a mental rehearsal set down to wash some bruise out of mind. I recognize there is meant to be plot, but the beginning of my seeing should have fewer maybes and tension should exist between the beach (its meaning) and the sea (its adventure). Then I could move on as the erased face should move on. As it is, the view here is stifling. Wherever I look, because debris is the same all over, I begin to feel the same loneliness lurks, the same moment always in need of release. You ask, *What do you think? What do you think?* Where art persists emotion should live, overwhelming, terrible beauty. This beauty must change me from its inception. Here, with each step into sand, there is a complicated retention performed by this woman's body in action with discard. Of course, informed by nature as we are, natural should be the space I am pulled into, the space we exist in. Still, I don't want always to be thinking where does the garbage come from? Now, what is here, what is rendered by the erased face abandons serenity.

The color unclotted (she decides) is a low-zipped hue, a bare midriff
against the newly dug slow surge.

From her hand, rifling through, then whirring back, comes an old I in
creaseless portrait.

Arising on the canvas, diverted from interruption, in bare feet is a she
holding uncalmly steady.

One and a half centimeters in diameter is her breath. She sculpts it,
scrapes at its coagulated surface.

She is parallel to herself, and then several inches deep into before the
image is sideswiped by a missed stroke.

The brush too heavy suddenly, or slipping her left foot in and out of its
sandal, she sees herself as extinguished of person,

in excess. Lost in darkness and distance, she thinks, though neither
adamic nor. . . . And yet, still hideous is the soul splitting

its dermis, a bloated sac pressurized into moments of debris, though
clouded over,

sprayed by the violence of that sea, its unmeshed chilliness.

Mechanically she applies a cold cloth to clot the drips,
considers the pale reds bleeding at their seams as a saucy spurring on of
such unslakable resemblance

(why won't you look at me?).

Then, more reasonably, Is this embarrassment, she wonders? Is embarrassment this feeling of exposure changing her surface where skin meets air? Is the body in landscape in a mirroring relationship to itself? Does the outside own more than its atmosphere or is the portrait in the landscape reflecting her insides on the surface? Is sky, and sky in water naturally imbrued if reflecting in her? How to separate responsibility out? How to keep from polluting the one in the other? How to stay in and out of it? "Where is the world without I in it?"

Suddenly she would have all reflections living; each brushstroke staying unprotected, occurring . . .

for balled is the exposed soul supplementing her fleshing out into the tight broken knots she bears as her bones' bared flesh, in aroused solemnity, absorbs all drainage its nature creates. Only her boundaries are rufescent. Their softest illumination splitting to inform the calm absolute. Here is landscape promising a voice without moisture, the hard scab of the powdered breath, filed down by loosening strokes, ridding the day hovering of residue. And, even closer, merging into an atmosphere determined by bandage-like gestures, is the I's muscular floor above this beach's undescended pools . . .

But then the brush that seams her hand—its nylon hair pressed horizontally to mirror the reddish frailty attaching to the glimpsed ersatz soul realized—is put down.

(Entrance into the furrowed brow,

carbonated mineral slipped in, astir, fizzy, pop, and still the tummy is shatterproof, like the isolating quiet that sends her heartbeat through her hands to the migrained eye in glare. What she calls "inevitable" the painting names depression's long stare, its lowering ceiling, the body's

rangy strokes, coalescing with such longing. She says that which she doesn't mean because how can she say "I am afraid of myself" to all that is a part of the self. If a world hurls, how to insist, I am not as the drowned, a mouth phlegm-filled, a swollen belly filling with earth's fuel, when the drawn feeling, a dark stain positioning, is that? Her interest is not with the dissolved, and yet dissolution surrounds, is a feeling in its duration. It observes its own density and is the constituted dissolved towards solidity. To this refuse, casting its shadow from flesh to canvas, she says, no. But see, the debris is the self within the trace, then the tide is the general condition implicated. She is afraid of herself.

Always the child answers,

This beach is armored, unbroken without exception, in its delicacy it acts as distraction to the flood that is joy in its earliest hints. After birth, I will perpetually stir. We will swirl together in this; still, I know it is not pleasing, never pleasing to see our protection trembling.

Wind reaching, touches to retouch the agitated surface as if a next were beginning:

A surface blushing, searing forward, solidly spilling that which was never a spill but a nearer fear freestanding.

Still activity stood a foot and three feet from where lowered lids closed contemplating what was never seen so never inclusive though spoken of.

To pour a pulsing, to violate the calm oneiric, to scratch the saturated—

To understand the existence of a direction contained, as in,
"Is she intentional, reflecting back the bluff?"

Each eye shuddering sky, each shudder and the I as a graying to ashen link.

To get past the grainy, the running down, charcoal-laden weight as dusk in density

physically roaring because extended all over.

Affixed finally is an extension of loss, its thoughts whispering, "crouch here oh damaged tender . . . cycle, cycle through until the self sets, and is bound into a regular contract with the eroding environs yielding . . . and still dimming

as easily as any sunlit pattern with this difference: the low ceiling compresses, harbors bands and sheets, plates of bone: and gasps, occupy, occupy the hurt articulation cross-hatched into this shallow space: murmuring face, facing: why won't you look to me: penciled stamina calling: I, I, I

undiminished, and the beached floral, and the ochre—

Beach Debris I

Charcoal, pencil and watercolor on linen and canvas board,
105 x 93 in.

OUR PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Christopher Davis

A blond boy, a homeless hooker, stares
up at our entertainment center. My God,

honey, it's my fault: he seemed
so innocent, twisting at the disco.

He believes we're both outside, changing
oil: therefore, he thinks, he should steal.

I peck through a peephole
in the eye of a giraffe

in a painting mom did
in private as she died.

At a petting zoo, she told me, giraffes
surrounded her, their golden necks bent

down, her palm, covered with Life Savers, out-
stretched, their long tongues flopping across

her lifeline. Their bedroom eyes,
she swore, blinked peacefully.

"I would never let you, lad, be hurt again.
Aren't you missing entertainment, bright

1

and shiny? You turn around, around,
around, hooked by a power higher

than your will to be alone, stronger
than me, this voice inside you no one hears."

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL PALMER

Michael Palmer was born in New York City in 1943. He is the author of eight books of poetry, including *The Lion Bridge: Selected Poems 1972-1995* (New Directions, 1998). His ninth, *The Promises of Glass*, will be published by New Directions in the spring of 2000. He has collaborated with the painters Micaëla Henich and Sandro Chia and on dance works with Margaret Jenkins, Paul Dresher and Rinde Eckert. In addition, he has translated the work of a number of poets, including Emmanuel Hocquard and Alexei Parshchikov, and his own poetry has been translated into over twenty languages. Michael Palmer's honors include the America Award for Poetry, two grants from the Literature Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Writer's Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1999 he was elected a Chancellor of The Academy of American Poets. This interview was conducted by Robert N. Casper at the author's house in San Francisco on February 22-23.

In your poems there's the danger of language slipping: the words themselves, the physicality of words, are apt to change at a moment's notice.

Which can make it somewhat self-cannibalizing. Yes, always there has been that doubt, I suppose, that focus on the fragility of signification, or at least, from another point of view, that insistent skepticism. But in the broadest sense I've felt a need to attend to the truth of skepticism—I think it never entirely disappears. If it did, if I arrived at some kind of transparency, it would be marvelous. I could just write and write . . .

Do you think there's a difference between a poetry of skepticism, which is something you've talked about in relation to someone like Celan, and a poetry of negation or complete silence?

Yes, I suppose so. I'm not sure what a poetry of "complete silence" would be. Recently I was asked by Middlebury College to talk about a film of interest to me as a writer, and I picked Beckett's movie *Film*, which is an homage to silent film. Buster Keaton is the star—the aged Buster Keaton, in fact the totally bemused Buster Keaton who didn't know what the hell he was doing in this maniac's movie. But it seemed a fascinating part of Beckett's approach to the possibility of silence. What's wonderful finally about Beckett is that there's a curiously desperate affirmation that even art is possible, along with life. And it comes through again and again, even in the horror of it all. This is true of the film: there's this homage to Keaton as one of the great figures of silent film who was so important to Beckett with respect to his theater. It's a moment in relation to his own later silences, his own later dispersal of character which begins with the switch from English to French and the renouncement of post-Joycean virtuosity. So yes, I think there's a great difference between negativity—critical negativity—and negation. Critical negativity offers a powerful form of artistic resistance to the assumptions or "givens" of the "individual"; negation seems to me more like despair.

I was wondering if negation might play a part in your attempt to redefine the Romantic sublime?

Oh there's no question it's related to Romantic theory. Academic discourse about the term "sublime" has been so tortuous and complex over the last fifteen years it makes you dizzy. As poets, I think we simply had to be done with those self-enraptured "poetic" experiences of the sublime and look beneath it to its relationship to language. It's about finding a place to begin—the essential place of lyric poetry, and also the nowhere, the nothing from which poetry begins. In this regard, in relation to this starting place (silence itself), I've always been fascinated by the fact that our work, however mystifying it may at first seem even to ourselves, finds itself in conversation with the world's poetries. This conversation starts and ends with

the entire living tradition of American poetry, but that for me is not some provincial concern. It's because those poets—Whitman, Poe, William Carlos Williams, and so many others who you might think of as *quintessential* American poets—have their own dialogue that stretches beyond, let's say, America.

You've talked of how only one aspect of Williams' work has been fit into the canon and of how the kind of resistance that various other poems offer has been ignored. Certainly that's true of a poet like Theodore Roethke. Is there a danger, now that the l=a=n=g=u=a=g=e poets and you have been more widely incorporated into what is considered to be American poetry, of becoming misincorporated?

It's unavoidable—cultural incorporation, the taming effect—and it happens in all the arts and in all, at least western-style, cultures. The film director Andrzej Wajda likes to quote Rousseau advising the Poles on their oppressors in 1771, "You can't prevent them from swallowing you, so you should at least make sure they don't digest you." As Octavio Paz said, reading is the thing that is in the present, that keeps the poem in the present. It is the only actual "present" of the poem—the now of its reading. And in our reading I think we have to rediscover the radical nature of the poem. A poetry with any lasting meaning goes to the root of its language and the root of our means of perception. In the case of Dante, it's certainly true. In the sweet new style, he's working within a long tradition while at the same time beginning to radically alter the notion of lyric address. You can also see it in the turbulence of the early cantos and their dream vision, where, remember, he's thinking with Aquinas, who at that point was still considered an extremely radical Catholic philosopher. It was a daring gesture on Dante's part. All of these things need to be understood to truly appreciate his accomplishment. The point is that with any poet you read as best you can past the conventions of your time and the cultural assumptions about what drawer that poet goes into. You spoke of Roethke, for example. He's of real interest to me, but I used to know people who wouldn't

read Roethke simply because he became, at a certain moment, part of the doxa. The canon is a very large, embracing (and excluding) thing, but don't allow that to determine what you do or what you don't read. If it determines what you *don't* read, it's just as bad as if it determines what you *do* read. And so likewise that question you brought up about this tar baby, l=a=n=g=u=a=g=e poetry. In one sense, it gives poets a chapter in the all-too-convenient book where they can be written about, culturally bracketed. But in another sense it's regrettably simplistic that people would lump this range of practitioners within some set of theoretically-derived assumptions or abstractions, so that a poet as distinctive as Lyn Hejinian, for example, would be thought of as entirely party to the same critical or theoretical matrix as vastly different poets, simply because they bear the same label.

How do you think you became grouped within that label?

It goes back to an organic period when I had a closer association with some of those writers than I do now, when we were a generation in San Francisco with lots of poetic and theoretical energy and desperately trying to escape from the assumptions of poetic production that were largely dominant in our culture. There was a great deal of vitality, and we were working together and reading things together. We were children, certainly, of the tumultuous years of Vietnam and the civil rights movement, trying to figure out our relationship to our practice and politics—all of those things that are really characteristic of neo-vanguardist movements. My own hesitancy comes when you try to create, let's say, a fixed theoretical matrix and begin to work from an ideology of prohibitions about expressivity and the self—there I depart quite dramatically from a few of the l=a=n=g=u=a=g=e poets. And also, I was never interested in joining a club—I was interested in interacting with some of the most vital minds of the time. When it becomes “us vs. them” in a programmatic way, that's totally troubling for me. And when certain people see themselves as the determiners of what not to do, my response is that if you're being told what not to do you turn around and do it—it's what the poem is there for, after all.

Do you feel that vanguard movements have to identify themselves in terms of “us vs. them” at the very point when they’re being assimilated into a larger culture?

It is always a curious irony of vanguardism. Remember, these things are happening within the culture, not outside it—that’s important to remember—yet vanguard movements take a position on the margins not for the sake of marginalization, but as a strategy for finding an open territory in which to operate, a territory where there isn’t any clear authority. They are still, in their own way, within, and generally find some kind of place for themselves. So now you find, for example, l=a=n=g=u=a=g=e poetry being historicized in this curious way, and certainly that’s unavoidable. Yet there is, as Nathaniel Mackey would say, the real danger of rubrics.

So vanguard movements naturally reach their end, their final conclusion, and life goes on?

Well, yes, poetry goes on, and the poets often go on in their own ways, but as a movement of people in their twenties and thirties it’s not going to be the same as when they’re in their fifties and sixties. You can have waves of people—there is a kind of second generation, I suppose, of the l=a=n=g=u=a=g=e school—but it changes, just as historical circumstances change. As I was saying, the 1960s and 1970s were a time of extraordinary turbulence and social upheaval. Here we are in the year 2000, talking with each other in San Francisco’s Noe Valley, and one invasion or agent of change we’re experiencing is from these twenty-something dot.com billionaires who now live all over the neighborhood—they’re effecting an almost instantaneous transformation of the culture and the economy. This is an erstwhile German/Irish working-class neighborhood, former home to struggling artists and activists as well, and in the space of a nanosecond it’s been transformed into a Mercedes-Benz parking lot. New energies, new social desires. Next door, in the Mission District, the Latino community has come under enormous economic pressure from these same forces. So it’s different historical circumstances, too, to say nothing of the extraordinary

technological changes in everyday culture, the extraordinary changes in senses of community, but also communication. When I was a very young writer—let's say twenty—and first meeting poets, they couldn't afford long-distance phone calls, so what they had was the post. You didn't hop on a plane the way you might today. The community was calling to each other from a great distance, to say "Hello, over there," and often people would be in contact for years and never actually meet in person. Now, with the phenomena of e-mail and websites and on-line magazines, there's a re-articulation of how poets speak to each other, an ease of virtual access—if not true access—that has radically altered the means of communication in a brief span of time. And what we think of as private space, which is where most poetry is generated, has changed.

Does it have an effect on how poetry is written?

Everything does, all such changes do. They also change our relationship to events themselves. Part of what a series like "Seven Poems within a Matrix for War" had to do with was the control of our means of perceiving events, the uses of the media to present selective, highly manipulated images as truth. Now, that was true in its own way during Vietnam, and in WWII, with the articulation of propaganda on all sides, but it's dramatically different with satellite television and digitalized imagery, where virtually anything can be falsified. It's not to say that the truth of things (did I say just that?) isn't there if you look for it, but people are often reluctant to look, or too busy, or simply indifferent. And truth can be very easily discredited within an atmosphere of unconstrained jingoism and flag-waving. What's saddest about such interventions (beyond the question of whether it's in any way humanly justifiable to undertake such a pattern of bombing and antipersonnel weaponry, or the employment of depleted uranium ordinance—utterly lethal to an ecosystem—to achieve a goal), what's most troubling, I think, is how easily people succumb to the assumption that what they are being told is in fact the unvarnished truth. With the Balkans,

it's been demonstrated in the aftermath that our figures accounting for atrocities bore a tenuous relationship to what happened. I'm not by any means defending the murderous instincts of Milosovic or Saddam Hussein—they're utterly complicit in these monstrosities. I look at it this way: what are the alternatives to this too-facile deploying of lethal force—are there alternatives to this, and how does the discourse collapse? How does the human break down so completely that the only alternative we have is to impose massive destruction and then, as in both instances here, massive suffering among civilian populations? Poetry almost certainly has no agency here. Of course I'm not a fantasist in that regard, but poetry must remain responsible to our manipulation of symbols and our signifying practices, must interrogate and where necessary subvert their habitual character. It must operate outside the comfort of assumptions, including assumptions about its own means.

I remember reading an essay by Amiri Baraka, "Cuba Libre," in which he talks of how a Cuban poet challenged him to explicitly incorporate the political into his poetry. It's a difficult issue. You seem to answer political questions in a more formal way, a way that's not what would commonly be defined as the political.

There's always, of course, the question Amiri Baraka would raise from his particular cultural perspective, or that a Neruda in some of his work would raise, of a kind of instrumentality in poetry, a poetry that is driven by something programmatically political. There are historical and cultural moments that call for such a response, whatever the costs or benefits may be. In my particular circumstance, I try to attend to the state of the polis through language. And that doesn't involve, necessarily, ideology-driven or agitation propaganda, so to speak. We as poets try to look at the effects of the political on language, and the effects of the political on the polis, again with a certain degree of skepticism. How do we maintain, or at least continue to search for, an ethics of the I/Thou? We spent the last century—whether it's vanguardists or Modernists or whomever—wondering about

the relationship between poetry and the political. The implicit—well, often explicit—question has always concerned the human and social justification for this strange thing, poetry, when it is not directly driven by the political or by some other, equally evident purpose (for example, as purveyor of homily). On the other side, there is the sense that a programmatic poetry has abandoned its relationship to its deeper human and cultural task and has become simply a vehicle, a neutralized vehicle, for something else, something already determined. Neither of these critiques listens to the other, and both are absolutist in their either/or sense of the poetic function, leaving poetry homeless and whipsawed. The only answer without evasiveness is that it's a somewhat historically determined question often decided by many personal, contextual, and other motivations. Poetry manifests the political in an entire spectrum of ways, and it is not a question that can be fully considered apart from the aesthetic dimension. Let's say, for argument's sake, that you take the direction of extreme aestheticism. It tries to free language into itself. Of course the danger there is the obvious one . . .

Pure play.

Pure play, yes, in non-space. Whereas the significant artistic thrust has always been toward artistic independence *within* the world, not *from* it.

I felt the weight of this issue in the letters of At Passages. Specifically, "Letter 7," in which you say, "Dear A, Scuttled ships are clogging the harbors / and their cargoes lie rotting on the piers / Prepare executions and transfusions / Put on your latest gear."

"They are soldering the generals back onto their pedestals," as I put it in "Autobiography 2." I wrote the "Letters to Zanzotto" at an extended moment when I was feeling the darkness of the Reagan-Bush era in this country, the Thatcher era in England, and political events elsewhere. The poems are a series of questions about the time and the century posed to a poet whom I didn't personally know—but a poet whose work resonated for

me and who was far enough away that I could write him a letter. So yes, it's full of the echoes of the political circumstance, and yet you wouldn't call it a political poetry, so to speak, nor would you call it an exposé. But the political is within it.

So you think poets have a responsibility to incorporate politics?

Not at all. It's not a matter of incorporating anything. It's simply a matter of whether it is a part of our consciousness, a part of our ethical status in the world, a part of how, once we're using the language, we're in the political already. It's sort of absurd, but it's true . . . everything is dangerous, fortunately. I think under other circumstances one might have to change the form of address very dramatically. Under Stalinism, poets were obliged to alter the form of address, and alter the metaphors, in order to maintain the resistance in what we might call, ironically, hermetic form. At another pole, you have the decision by certain of the French poets during WWII to switch to a populist, strikingly conventional poetry in the service of the Resistance. The poetic results of that were often more than problematic, but nonetheless one understands the motivations.

A great example in contemporary poetry is someone like Bei Dao, whose work was a direct challenge to the Chinese government. And yet, in America, it seemed to slip right into an acceptable lyric mode.

Yes, the misunderstanding (might we say "mistranslation"?) of his generation is quite remarkable. For example, the translated tag for Bei Dao and his generation, as the "Misty Poets," while a quite literal rendering from the Chinese, is in fact very misleading. It suggests a kind of vague, perhaps nostalgic impressionism, where what's actually being designated is a poetry of cloaked meaning and necessary semantic indirection. I was talking to Bei Dao about that—we were doing a seminar together at Stanford recently—and I was saying it's a little bit like forgetting the dimension or the context

of Akhmatova's personal lyrics. The authorities, of course, saw her poems as an outrage against Stalinist propriety and a subverting of socialist realism, and it drove them crazy. So she became, this singular, defenseless woman, an enemy of the state. It's remarkable what even very quiet poetry can lead to.

This raises the whole question of the role of the public poet. You've recently been elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. How do you feel about the position?

It's an odd business. The context of it is such that you have this institution that, to my mind, was in grave trouble, very narrow in its sense of the field of American poetry, very dominated by a particularly Anglo-American vision of what the poetic landscape could be in America. Robert Creeley, who was elected with me, speaks about America's poetries. The wonderful thing about America is its poetries, not its poetry, and I agree with that—the extraordinary range, from the Frost of New England to Amiri Baraka, Barbara Guest, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. And so Adrienne Rich and Robert Creeley and I, along with Yusef Komunyakaa and a couple of other people, were elected to help bring about a more representative sampling of the landscape. To me it means nothing as an honor one way or another, but it is an opportunity perhaps to help the Academy refashion itself into an organization that better serves through its resources—which are unprecedented for American poetry—rather than committing so much energy to articulating a status quo of all-too-predictable prize winners. That's where much of the resentment lies, historically. So how do you, as one person said, take the "Academy" out of the American Academy and make it a fully responsible organization? How at least to partly refocus an organization with a history of stasis and cultural mandarinism and a rather constricted, institutionally derived, Atlanticist focus? I'm heartened by the fact that Bill Wadsworth, who oversees the programming, is a dynamic and open person who's done a great deal to reform and to open up the literary programs, the readings and such. And my hope is that we can open, in the same way, the

functions of the Chancellors and find out whether the organization can become more responsive to the variety of innovative poetic subcultures than it's been in the past.

Do you think it's possible, considering Creeley's definition of American poetries, that American poetry can be a shared landscape? Or will there always be factions?

There will always be a tremendous amount of contention, and it would be bad if it suddenly became a harmonious and sort of bland, liberal pluralist environment. I don't think that's a problem. Poets will always operate against their best interests if you give them the opportunity. Also, there's at once a great deal and very little at stake in poetry. Poets throw away or give over their lives in the most interesting and extreme instances, and among these, therefore, everything is at stake, so their arguments are not going to be gentle ones. So no, I don't think we'll ever see a seamless harmony or utter permission, and I wouldn't want that to happen.

Have you felt the desire or had the opportunity to teach on a full-time basis?

I've taught quite happily from time to time, and I've had the occasional invitation to run writing programs and things like that. But for various reasons, I've turned down all the tenured offers so far. I like to come in for a little while and then leave. Marjorie Perloff made the point that, at its worst, the university can be this narrow-minded, contentious thing, but at its best it can be a marketplace of ideas, of people passing through—an agora—and I like that image. I should add that I would've had to give up a great deal of what has been significant practice for me (for example, all the work I've done with dance over time) if I'd become a full-time teacher. The open schedule has made a tremendous difference in the configuration of my life as poet, and you can see how it's marked my work. I've felt more free working outside the walls and also freer to collaborate with artists here and around the world as opportunities have arisen.

How did your interest in dance come about?

It came about when we moved to San Francisco and my wife was casting around for a place where she could take a fairly technically-oriented contemporary dance class. There were not many options here: either the sort of free-form, counterculture kind of thing, which didn't interest her, or classical ballet. But Margy Jenkins opened a studio, and she was teaching a revised Cunningham technique which combined a contemporary approach with an interesting rigor. My wife started studying with Margy, and Margy found out I was a poet and wanted to see my work. Then she asked if she could take a few poems and work with them with the dancers, and I said, "Sure." It turned out we had similar general interests in contemporary dance—that is to say, she had studied with Cunningham, whom I admired a great deal, and John Cage as well. And she had danced with Twyla Tharp in Tharp's first company and had been involved with the Judson Church Dancers. Those were people of great interest to me, people working in innovative improvisational forms with new formal grids, exploring ordinary movement.

How has that kind of collaboration pushed the boundaries of your work?

There were a variety of influences. One was that, when I was using language—but even when I wasn't, when I was simply envisioning a structure, for example—I was working with the idea of actual space. Over time, my own language took on a certain physicality or gestural character that it hadn't had as strongly in the earliest work. Margy and I would often work with language as gesture and gesture as language—we would cross these two media, have them join at some nexus. And inevitably then, as I brought certain characteristics of my work to dance, and to dance structure and gesture, it started crossing over into my work. It added space to the poems.

Well there's certainly a focus on the body in your work, or at least a focus on the physicality of language, that I would imagine the collaboration helped to define.

Probably so. I always found it remarkable—for example, if you spend months and months in a rehearsal studio you acquire this intimate knowledge of the language of the dancers' bodies, each one entirely distinct from the other even when they're performing the same movement. I can see a dancer I've worked with twenty years later walking on the street in the other direction and I'll know who it is just by the character of their walk. This is not remarkable at all. Any dancer has this quality. But that impressed me in an extraordinary way, because dance has to be disciplined and coordinated. Yet I found the individuation within it moving and somewhat like poetry in the sense that you're using the common tongue with a kind of discipline, however you take that word.

Charles Bernstein once asked you a question—"Would you mind telling us a little bit about yourself?"—which provided the impetus to Notes for Echo Lake. How would you respond to that differently now?

I'm just as in the dark about the self as ever. I suppose formally I might respond differently in the sense that *Notes for Echo Lake* was generated, in part, by what I thought was an amusing question. Here you have a journal called *l=a=n=g=u=a=g=e* being founded and the first thing they're asking about is that old-fashioned thing, the self. I wanted to look at the selves we carry with us through a life and the self's constitution, not only through that notorious "voice that is deep within us" but through multiple voicings that occur in our work as poets. It's a project that's carried on through the rest of the work.

In The Promises of Glass, the title section and the "Q" section adopt personas that carry out unified narrative explanations of the self. How did that shift happen?

A lot of my early work is anti-rhetorical. As the work evolved, from perhaps the mid-to-late 1980s onward, I became more interested in looking at rhetorical artifice and how it operates within the poem and speech itself—

this odd rhetoric of display and persuasion. And with that, I think the persona—the obviously false persona, the theatricalized persona—began to appear in the work. “Q” for example, or Quodlibet, involves an extraordinary range of figures who have been in my life in one way or another. But I don’t at all see “unified narrative explanations of the self” there, only explorations.

It was interesting to find that Quodlibet means “whimsical combination of familiar melody or text” and Quod, which in the poem is the abbreviation of Quodlibet, means “prison.”

Yes, it means many different things. That section was completed while I was finishing up *The Promises of Glass*, a time of intense emotional turmoil for me. My mother was in the process of dying, and it was a somewhat tumultuous leave-taking I had to attend to. At the same time, I had this traveling schedule. I was unsettled both physically and emotionally and trying to negotiate the medical and legal bureaucracy—things I’m least suited to do. But then, traveling on, I thought, “Well, rather than waiting for some imagined time when I can sit down at my desk to complete this work, I really should go to work in this non-place where I am.” That’s the place of Q, and so it became more notational. All of these things began to construct themselves from where I was and where I wasn’t. It was built up, was completed in that form—*en route*, so to speak.

In the whole of your work, sequences themselves have come to play an ever-larger role. You’ve talked of how, in Sun, you were moving into something more raw, and yet you were writing sequences that, as you said, contain more formal considerations. Could you talk about that?

That’s a funny paradox, isn’t it? You’re always, in one way, striving for a greater immediacy. There’s raw experience that is one parameter of our information, as well as that moment of poetic reflection which draws you back from—sometimes can even cut you off from—that very information.

In his own ironic way, someone like Frank O'Hara talks about this. O'Hara was always searching for something like the immediate, yet there isn't any lack of "past" in his work, and the artifice of construction goes on rather cunningly even though his work sounds spontaneous.

I thought it would be useful to differentiate between what you call "voicings" and "citations." I assume that the voicings in your poems are italicized texts, parallel source texts, while citations serve as phantom texts that aren't necessarily apparent.

It's been said, and I think it's true, that I use citation or quotation differently than the Modernists. Pound will use it didactically to point you towards a Chinese source text or Eliot will do it as a kind of display of a cultural framework he's trying to build in the name of his sense of tradition. For me, citation becomes a sort of sampling, as in music, which I think is one approach to it. But it also has to do with imbedding voices within voices so that you are often not aware that it comes from a source text at all. It's just a layering of voice upon voice, or an intercutting of voices, without saying "Here's this and here's that source, and we'll build a culture from there."

In the "Dear Lexicon" interview, you said you forgot some of your citations, and that they would get misrepresented, which for you was one of the more interesting aspects of using them. Has this always been a central part of your process?

Going way back, yes. The first poem in my first book has, among other things, a quotation from Heine that nobody would necessarily notice. There are things taken from here and there in my reading, which might be anything from linguistics to an erotic memoir or whatever—reading from all across the spectrum. Rather than being some display of bogus erudition, they are an enhancement or a filling-out of the voice beyond the personal, beyond the self-same aspects of subjectivity. A lot of my work has been a struggle against the self-identical or an exploration of what one finds beyond the simple construction of the personal.

Is your inclusion of citation a reading or a re-reading at the same time as it is a writing?

Oh, yes—I think they're co-dependent. [Laughs.] Or, to put it in less pathological terms, they're parallel activities. In a funny way, they have a kind of identity, I think—writing as reading and reading as writing. One can explore those as the categorical assumptions break down. And so certainly that's the case. I try to keep in mind that we are always "being read" by the poem.

Do you think including outside texts can become an overbearing practice, that those texts can wrestle for control over the development of the poem itself?

I don't mind if they do control it. There are a few notes on that, I suppose: one is that I like to be taken elsewhere by these things. I like to be sent off onto a tangent—rather than rushing down this same, small stream, for example—and have curious other winds blow me off course. It's to arrive at what for me is the essential errancy of discovery in a poem—the "drunken boat," so to speak. What I'm not doing, and I think this is important to emphasize, is the kind of collaging that has become fairly commonplace in which you take a text, dismantle it and, out of a kind of processual, constructivist impulse, put it back together, cutting up and co-joining. That is another thing entirely, and it can get writers into an area that's too facile. Such a procedure has the danger of losing some of the more precarious necessities and risks of composition. If you become overly dependent on a constructive method, where the poem virtually assembles itself out of given materials, there's a potential loss of several crucial dimensions of the work. I'm working on a piece right now, for example, that has no citation at all, and that's not uncommon.

Is it a choice you make before the poem begins?

No. It inserts itself, or as the painter said, "I thought it needed a little yellow over there." You feel the weights and balances both in terms of the sub-

ject and the harmonics of the poem. It's not necessarily a procedurally precise thing. I find much of it is intuitive—you feel your way through, hopefully to some place you haven't been. And it changes. For example, a poem like the first "Sun" uses citation in a much more disruptive way than it's used in the second.

And does the disruption in "Sun," like in "Seven Poems within a Matrix for War," try to address a historical condition?

In many ways, in all their different forms, they probably tried to address the cultural landscape before us. I made a dance work with Margy Jenkins some years ago called *The Gates (Far Away Near)*. One of its premises was Chaucer's *Parlement of Foules*, which was a gathering to celebrate erotic consummation, but there's all this political squabbling that goes on—it's great fun. We had been gathering and dispersing with these dancers for years, so I said, "Let's begin there, with the premise that we're gathering at the seven gates of the city; we're looking in at each of these gates to see how things are." You look in at one gate, and it's a boulevard lined with limousines, and you look in at another gate and it's tenement houses and fires in trashcans. Now that I think of it, the work reflects the circumstances of my childhood, which is to say I was growing up in a small hotel between 5th and 6th Avenue on 46th Street in New York. As you came out and you turned left and went to 5th Avenue, you saw the accumulation of capital, the glitter of capitalism; if you turned right, you were in Hell's Kitchen, you were on Avenue of the Americas, with its pawn shops still and its poverty and marginality.

And you were an observer of both sides.

Yes, in the midst of the contradictions of capitalism, which is a good place to learn things, always. In retrospect, it made a tremendous impression on me. 47th Street was, and still is, the Diamond District, where Hassidic Jews ran the city's diamond trade, and you saw these anachronistic figures with

their hair in ringlets, *payess*, walking up and down the street—that was another world. And on that same street, the great Gotham Book Mart of Miss Stelloff. So the worlds of the city . . . I was very conscious of that in my early work because of the discrepancies, but also because of the ethnic shift: you went into a neighborhood and it would be Ukrainian, another would be Italian, another would be Puerto Rican, and so on. In a funny way, a lot of my poetry is still looking in at the various gates. Of course, that's a very exhausting process, the world itself being at once near and very far away. Your emotions are shuttling all the time as you try to look at the thing itself, witness the world. You're acutely aware that the act of measuring alters the data in your hand. Acutely aware of the limits of representation.

Yet I wouldn't say that your work is limited to this.

One of the things that *The Promises of Glass* attempted—and I hope not in a pretentious sense—was to just break through that wall and do it anyway, be done with *aporia*. And I think a certain amount of the linguistic heightening and shift that happens in the language of the new collection—the shifting point of view you were remarking upon earlier, and the almost carnivalesque play—was done to get past that simple notion of limit that plagues us all. We either pretend it's not there or take another route around it.

You once said your poems are not limited to the dimensions of the literary or even to good writing. In the new collection, there are moments of slackness, moments that turn away from the lyric condensation and beautiful rhythms that your work is noted for. However, you still bookend those poems with more lyrical sections, for instance "The White Notebook," which I thought was an instructional poem along the lines of "Dearest Reader."

Yes, in many of the collections the first poem acts that way. "The White Notebook" came out of an interesting experience. I had been asked to write a little catalog for a painter named Irving Petlin, who is an old friend and with whom I've actually collaborated. He had a new show called "The Seine

Series," a series of large pastels—two of which were an homage to Edmond Jabès and two of which were an homage to Paul Celan. Irving was living in Jabès' neighborhood in Paris at the time, and he was studying the river as it flooded: it was a rainy winter, and the river had come up to right below the bridges. From his studio window, he could see the odd trinity of cultures constituted by the Cathedral of Notre Dame, with the Holocaust Memorial below it, and off to the extreme right the *Institut du Monde Arabe* or Arab Cultural Institute. He was thinking about the turbulent negotiations among these worlds as they reflected the century, and along with that thinking about—and this is where, I suppose, the relation to my poetics comes in—disappearances, which is to say WWII, of course, and the deportation of the Jews. When Irving was first in Paris during the Algerian war, he saw the so-called "riot"—a famous demonstration against the Algerian war. Over 1,000 people were killed, and many were simply dumped into the Seine by the Paris police. He witnessed that. Then there was Paul Celan—who, after all, committed suicide by jumping from the Pont Mirabeau and whose body turned up days later at one of the locks downstream. During the same period Irving turned to Edmond Jabès and *The Book of Questions*, and the construction of a theater for the voices of the disappeared. I responded to the dual functions of disclosure and withholding that happen in the poem so interestingly—simultaneous disclosure, withholding, one and the same perhaps. While meaning to disclose, we do it by withholding. And, although we mean to withhold, we reveal all sorts of things. So that's probably the dialectic of it, and in "The White Notebook" there's a certain amount of citation of Celan as well as the story of the lovers at the narrative heart of *The Book of Questions*.

Does that context inform the rest of your new book?

I wonder. It wants to say something there about what is at stake. *The Promises of Glass*, after all, is a phrase I took from Pierre Missac, who wrote a book called *Walter Benjamin's Passages*. It's not so much a scholarly work in any

orthodox sense as a personal rumination on the thought of Benjamin, who was a friend of Missac. At one point, he talks about Benjamin's arcades project, and his fascination with the "promises of glass": the glass and iron architecture of the arcades as well as the 20th century use of glass in the Bauhaus and Modernist tradition, where glass has this fascinating character of being transparent and opaque, and represents a kind of aspiration.

And a mirror.

And yes, exactly—that's a mirror of the poem, both transparent and opaque, a mirror of the world.

There is a moment in "Autobiography 5" that reads: "Isn't there another story / consistent with sand? / How it turns to mirror-glass / when heated in your hand. / The sounds it makes / make another story."

This idea of glass once again, this century of shattering glass—whether you think of *Kristallnacht*, the initiation of the Holocaust, or the promises of glass that could never be kept, but are made nonetheless as part of some odd utopian promise. And the glass is also a lens, of course, that we gaze through, for better or worse.

I also thought, in the manuscript, of the idea of promises—the assumptions and beliefs that such a word entails.

Well, the century we've now left behind (have we?—we'll see, I don't know if we ever leave centuries behind; I'm not old enough, even now, to tell) was also a century of continuous promises. There was the fascist cultural dream, or the Stalinist cultural dream, or the capitalist cultural dream—you have the big three. All made their promises, one form of utopia or another: the Reich, the People's Republic, or the perfectability of middle-class life. And poetry always implicitly is asking, What can we say? What is of use for us

to say under these circumstances? Or, *how* can we say under these circumstances? How can we speak in a way that is not simply anodyne, consolatory, or escapist? It's very easy for poetry to slip over into that area of comforting verse—not to say that it can't attempt comfort as well, indeed it can. But for that to become its only or central function would represent a grave compromise of its critical force.

I feel that even a poetry of skepticism is also a poetry of great faith. You can't have one without the other.

That's what I've always said to people—if I was feeling hopeless, I wouldn't do it. I mean, it's hopelessly an act of faith. And it's a faith in language as well: the possibility to signify—and thus to signify the possible.

I want to ask you about the role of the erotic in your work. There's a moment in the poem "Well," for example, in which you write "How to make love / with a watch on your wrist."

It's an essential question.

Talk about the relationship between time and physicality!

John Berger explores this in his extraordinary novel, *G.* Making love, having sex, whatever—that doesn't sound so hot, either!—is outside of time, is a suspension of time. He has this one great scene where two characters make love at the moment of the revolution. A crowd gathers in time, passing along—history happens—but the lovers are outside of time, in erotic time. The conjunction of those things fascinates me . . . and of course famously, when you're lost in a poem—I hope this doesn't sound like romantic drivel—you're in another time also, in the time of the poem, the durations that the poem is making. We've all experienced becoming lost, hours passing as we think about a comma: in or out, to be or not. And then you wonder why the light has "suddenly" changed, and it's late afternoon.

Often, the only reason you realize this is because it's getting darker and darker—the page is disappearing!

A few of the poems in The Promises of Glass move into what might be called prose poetry.

Some of the pieces—particularly the sequence “The Promises of Glass”—are right in the gray area between poetry and prose. That's exactly the area that I'm exploring. You go to prose because there are more things to include, messier things, than you can within the box of poetry (though not all poems are boxes, by any means). Life is messy, and you don't want to propose it as necessarily all too neat or too compact. It sprawls. Sometimes we go to prose for a broader permission, in this case the different sorts of line. There are many different measures that are involved in *The Promises of Glass*, sometimes syllabically grounded, sometimes word or syllable count. They're hidden measures, undisclosed measures. The entire prosody of “The Promises of Glass” is based on the numbers 18 and 36 for a variety of pseudo-kabbalistic reasons we don't need to go into.

Your own private obsessions.

That's right. They're best left undisclosed. Thank God I'm the only one who has access to them. But I've always been interested in hidden measures, too—ones that are there as the grid of the poem but don't come forward with the same kind of foregrounded announcement that, say, the pentameter does.

Are you talking about formal considerations?

Well, no considerations are entirely formal. One of the things I worked with was how numbers always stand for things. I don't think a measure is ever a purely formal device. When you use a measure you might be said to

be “calling out” in a particular way. You recur to a particular form, say the romantic sonnet, which invokes an entire tradition and yet at the same time the form changes. Form in that regard is only trivial when it’s arbitrary, when you’re just trying to behave yourself. Likewise, the measures I tend to work with have different forms of reference, given that we live within the five fingers of the hand and seven days of the week and all of those things, with their histories. What informs, what simply conforms?

It was interesting to see such obviously formal devices as rhyme in this collection, especially the “Johnny Jump-up” sections in “Autobiography 6.” Where did that come from?

That comes right out of my head—again, the hidden compartments.

The one moment I assumed was from somewhere else! [Laughs.]

No, that’s me—that’s doggerel I can make by myself. I don’t know what this has to do with the structure of that series, but it started appearing, sometimes as farce, with greater and greater frequency. It has to do with the way in which many of those poems have a patent absurdity to them. Rhyme has the power to heighten that, among its other powers. It’s not that I haven’t used rhyme intensely in the past, but it’s been dispersed—harmonic assonance, consonance, tone-leading, all of that. In that section, there’s more end-rhyme. I’ve always liked bad rhyme, too, so I hope I have enough of that.

Bad rhyme as in near or slant rhyme?

No, that’s good rhyme. [Laughs.] In the sense of a too-obvious rhyme, not in the hands of a terrible poet, but in the hands of a poet who knows what he or she is doing with the bad rhyme. It’s a form of irony as well. I’m very conscious of writing against myself, writing against the poetic in a certain way, and allowing or even encouraging a certain overflow into that. First of

all, any contemporary practice—let's say lyric practice—any lyric practice of any interest in our time has had to include the anti-lyrical as part of its process; otherwise we're back with Lamartine. Certainly one aspect of this book is me thinking against myself. That's probably true of all my work, but it's more boldly or baldly stated in *The Promises of Glass*.

I remember you briefly explained in your essay "Poetic Obligations (Talking about Nothing at Temple)" why you avoided doing critical writing. Could you elaborate on that decision?

I was always more interested in writing poetics from the point of view of the poet, rather than—if I can make that distinction—the poet-critic, where a poet operates both as a writer of verse, let's say, and as a fairly orthodox academic critic. For me, it's very important to maintain the insistence that all I know is learned right in the poem.

In spite of all the citations in your poems from philosophical texts?

Well, I learned that as a poet, too, and through their entry into the work. It's not a matter of denying you have a territory of reading in philosophy and theory and elsewhere, but to maintain perspective in the course of making poetry. That's how I know Wittgenstein—not as a philosopher or a student of philosophy, but in the course of writing poetry. All I have is what I've learned in the life of doing that. It's what I can usefully share with people.

In another interview you talk about the profound loss that goes into writing poetry. What did you mean by that?

In a materially-grounded culture you have to give up certain options. With the few exceptions of celebrated public poets, you have to be willing to operate more or less in invisibility and without any cultural portfolio. You have to live, in my experience, at odds. At times that feels extremely rich,

and at times that feels really quite bleak. I don't know any poet who escapes that despair from time to time, whether it has to do with the sense of occasional futility or the sense of the ultimate impossibility of what you're trying to do. Robert Duncan used to compare the life of the poet to the moment in Samurai epics when the hero comes to grief. (I think Robert was being quite serious about this, though it sounds amusing.) It is the moment when the Samurai is done slaying all of the bad guys, that is. There you are, putting away your sword for the last time, and you realize that you have come to nothing by that fact—that once again you're just sort of wandering and cut loose. Finishing something, in a certain way, slays many enemies and dragons, but it also brings you to grief and back to a sense of nothingness and emptiness, and a degree of isolation. I suppose, too, you become the one you've slain.

There are a couple of quotes I'd like to bring up: one is from Emmanuel Levinas, "a poet often loses his place." And the other is something you said in the "Dear Lexicon" interview: "Whenever a poem makes me disappear, I find that very interesting." Could you respond to both phenomena?

I think it's simply the feeling of non-identity when a poem arrives beyond trivial calculations or manipulations of subject and/or narrative, beyond the impulses toward preconceived sentiment—that it arrives beyond your perceived limits as a maker. You get that curious feeling that in no simple sense did I make *this*—it's the elements, the words talking back to you. The language speaking. Maybe that sounds a little grandiose and romantic, I don't know, but it is the feeling you get if you do something that goes beyond your own understanding. And it need be no different from a mathematician working with his or her sense of beauty and number, harmony, arriving after a day at the blackboard at something that makes sense beyond what they had to begin with, makes a sense of its own.

It certainly sounds like a romantic thing to say, in the sense of the Romantic sublime, but I think it's important to address—honestly and without a fear of being earnest—the desire to “do something that goes beyond your understanding” that both poets and readers of poetry have.

If you read the Greek lyric poets, some of whom were also apparently epic poets (there is the legend of Sappho's lost epic), they had such a desire then. So, in a much larger sense, it may be the spirit of romance to which Pound refers, which is that sense of something more and other than you are.

Not a bad thing to ascribe to.

No. Brings it back to that remark of Jack Spicer's: “Even when the poet is wrong, the poem is sometimes right.”

LOVE'S PORTFOLIO

Gillian Conoley

A fragment
of a fair copy would undo our slant meeting,

an in-flight movie
where we chatted

how life was choosing not choosing.

Joy and gravitation,
the day turned

canonical,
my book's cover and spine.

The sky blued
vagrant scribblings into print culture,

what shall be clad,
the day's whole cloth.

A scribal hand,
a something.

A kiss away, a kiss away, a reader's
curve,

a reader's little addict
in black pants who would like to

sit in the dust as Heav'n's other spangles do.

I lowered

I wrote the answers on her hand

I approached

as an alias, trachea

without sound, my signature, bright felon.

SAGRES

Mark Levine

One thousand thousand pearl-drenched skiffs were counted
trashing the breeze on the land's ledge
nets and bundles of bare cargo
cast to the leafy tide
eyes scrubbing the white rocks and
meat tossed inland

We climbed the stick of light
at the corner where the twinned currents met
"The former limit" moss on its iron handle
colonial glow like a pasted feather
beneath us a fisherman
in a costume of skins
perched on the rocks a curtain of spray
at his feet on his brow moonblast
unbaited nail on his line

A raft of offerings arrayed us on a mat
outside the terminal. A mulecart packed with corn
a square guitar a boy selling particles
wrapped in newsprint a boy rubbing himself
against you. You requested a vault
a carved room poised on its end
built of cotton and descriptions of land

I have foregone my vista
said the monitor
I have canvassed the site for you
in your mantle but was slanted
by weather and confused
I retrieved three ivory shoes and
the spine of an unclean fish to guide
you to your next slumber.

IN A DREAM I SPEAK WITH MY WIFE

Laura Mullen

In the dream I speak to my wife.
For? At? In my dream. In this
Dream. Someone makes the thing
Slow down, has time to worry
About word choice. I think
I cut her throat, though I couldn't
Swear to it. In a dream
I tell her exactly what happened
And she makes me repeat it:
She says we have to get the story
Straight. Our story. When she laughs
A bright bib of blood gleams wet
Down the front of her black dress.
In this dream she says Okay,
Now where did you find the knife?
My hands are clean, my hands
Are empty; I say if you'd just let me
Write it down, that would help.
I hate it when she laughs.
I speak to her past everything
That divides us, I could swear
To that. When she's past seeing
What she calls The *really funny*
Side of all this she says No,

No notes. She touches a sticky
Red hand to the front of my white
Shirt, and she isn't even
Smiling anymore when she
Says no again. No, she says,
You have to have it by heart.

GHOST STORY

Today I don't believe it.

Never mind: sneak back.

Today I talk

To the window: How do you break

Silence? I am, my whole life is,

To shut out grief.

I hear you sniff.

I'm a ghost,

Already writing a memory.

Today I don't believe it.

The light—stay—

In the transparent

Web, steady;

Shelter and trap.

I live In a house cracked— Alight—a light Sheering off:

Smoke pouring out

Of the weaknesses.

You can't tell that.

I hear you sniff.

Selecting another

Hanger ringing back

I hear you shudder in the corner,

I hear you.

I hear you banging on the glass

I hear you forgetting,

Shift, the wire

In place.

To get attention not to break it.

I'm a ghost.

I'm a ghost.

I'm a ghost.

A new house.

In the cedar-scented dimness

I hear you choose among

All the briefly embodied

(Stinking of smoke, of sweat):

Which will be white enough.

The story as you tell it.

Heart of.

The pieces in the street.

I hear you

Forget that.

Today not.

I'm speaking the thin stuff Downward drifts translucent

In fragments. Still hot.

Today I don't believe it.

What window opens wide enough

To admit.

Eyes shut.

The words Appear as if by magic. I'm a ghost. I can't speak.

The woven, tensile

Pale, *almost transparent*.

I'm a ghost.

In layers of fear

And silence.

Never mind, slip back.

You check
Your facts.

Limbless.
Voiceless.

The blank

Pages, age-

Stiffened, break.

I'm already writing.

Refusing to tell it.

Refusing again to tell it.

I live in a house.

In the ashes you find
Your untouched gifts.

MIND THE GAP

Matthew Zapruder

A little portrait of me lies in the flowerbed
making allusions, watching her comb her hair.
She sings into the shattered mirror:
"But you will last as long as the rose,
as long as the glass, glass tulips . . ."
A can opener smiles on the night table.

I remember she loved and feared the dark.
Whenever the horses broke loose and threatened the begonias
her heart trembled under my hand like a bat.
We'd huddle all night in bed, counting.
The horses filled us with the ineffable grandeur
of their silent pounding, or something like that.
Mostly I liked not knowing what to expect.

The sun looms angrily, high above, stranded.
She walks, or rather meanders, towards my portrait, chanting
"Phillip, your green thumbs, the envy of All Wales."
Each wisp of her hair grows larger, they wave and shine
like snakes you can see through. How strange. She
bends over me, blocking the sun.

CONTRIBUTORS

AGHA SHAHID ALI has published seven books of poetry including, most recently, *The Country Without a Post Office* (Norton: 1998). He has also edited *Ravishing Disunities: Real Ghazals in English*, forthcoming from Wesleyan University Press.

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ANNE CARSON will publish a translation of Sappho's fragments with Knopf in 2002.

PAUL CELAN (1920–1970) is a pseudonym of Paul Antshel, generally recognized as the greatest post-war German poet. This selection was reprinted with permission from Wesleyan University Press, who will publish *Glottal Stop: 101 Poems by Paul Celan* (trans. by Heather McHugh and Nikolai Popov) in the fall.

PURA LÓPEZ COLOMÉ was born in Mexico City in 1952 and is the author of several books, including *El sueño del cazador*, *Aurora*, and *Intemperie*.

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SAPPHO (c. 625 B.C.) was a prolific Greek poet. Her work was collected into nine books around the third century B.C. Most of them were lost, and she was known only through quotations found in the works of other ancient writers. In 1900 fragments of her poems were discovered on papyrus in Egypt. Only a few hundred lines of her poetry remain.

CHRISTOPHER SMART (1722–71) was an English poet and editor. *Jubilate Agno* was written over a period of roughly four years during Smart's incarceration in a mad house. This selection was made from Fragment C.

JAMES TATE's newest collection of poems, *Memoir of the Hawk*, will be published by Ecco Press in January 2001.

BRYAN TOMASOVICH's "Bumblebees and Butterflies" is one section of a book-length manuscript, *Oisconsin: The Dead in Our Clouds*.

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offense, which is the best of all"

— Christopher Smart

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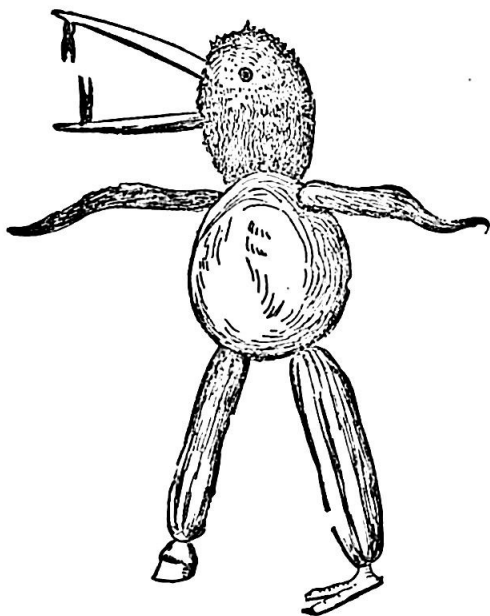
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A NOTE ON THE COLOPHON

The *ghrûl* or *ghrûl* was drawn by the nomad Doolan the Fehjy at el-Hejr for Charles M. Doughty (1845-1926), who recorded it in his *Travels in the Arabia Deserta*: "And since no man, but Philemon, lived a day fewer for laughing, have here the portraiture of this creature of the Creator, limned by a nomad: 'a cyclops' eye set in the midst of her human-like head, long beak of jaws, in the ends one or two great sharp tushes, long neck; her arms like chickens' fledgling wings, the fingers of her hands not divided; the body big as a camel's, but in shape as the ostrich; the sex is only feminine, she has a foot as the ass' hoof, and a foot as an ostrich. She entices passengers calling to them over the waste by their names, so that they think it is their own mother's or their sister's voice.'"

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